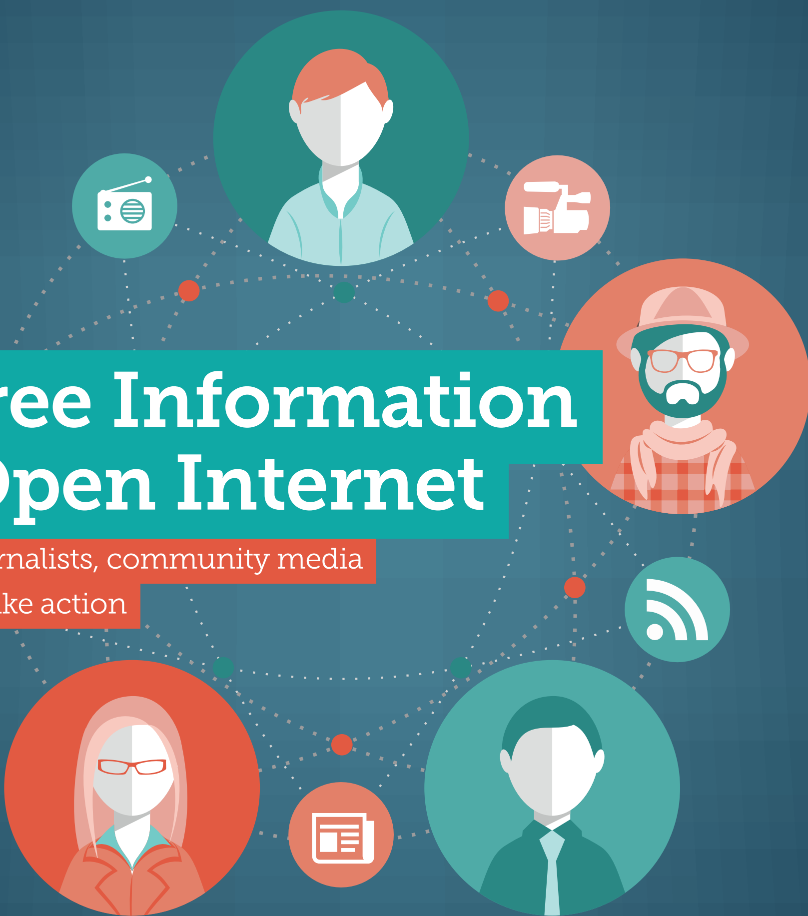
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Independent journalists, community media and hacktivists take action

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The Passerelle Collection

The *Passerelle Collection,* realised in the framework of the Coredem initiative (Communauté des sites ressources pour une Démocratie Mondiale – Community of Sites of Documentary Resources for a Global Democracy), aims at presenting current topics through analyses, proposals and experiences based both on field work and research. Each issue is an attempt to weave together various contributions on a specific issue by civil society organisations, media, trade unions, social movements, citizens, academics, etc.

The publication of new issues of *Passerelle* is often associated to public conferences, "Coredem's Wednesdays" which pursue a similar objective: creating space for dialogue, sharing and building common ground between the promoters of social change.

All issues are available online at: **www.coredem.info**

Coredem, a Collective Initiative

Coredem (Community of Sites of Documentary Resources for a Global Democracy) is a space for exchanging knowledge and practices by and for actors of social change.

More than 30 activist organisations and networks share information and analysis online by pooling it thanks to the search engine Scrutari. Coredem is open to any organisation, network, social movement or media which consider that the experiences, proposals and analysis they set forth are building blocks for fairer, more sustainable and more responsible societies.

Ritimo, the Publisher

The organisation Ritimo is in charge of Coredem and of publishing the *Passerelle Collection*. Ritimo is a network for information and documentation on international solidarity and sustainable development. In 90 locations throughout France, Ritimo opens public information centres on global issues, organises civil society campaigns and develops awareness-raising and training sessions.

Ritimo is actively involved in the production and dissemination of plural and critical information, by means of its website: **www.ritimo.org**

E-change platform

The e-change platform is a collective project that proposes both tools and guidelines for a citizen use of information and communication technologies.
www.plateforme-echange.org

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ICTS THAT ARE REVOLUTIONISING THE WAY WE WORK: CREATIVE PROPOSALS AND ALTERNATIVES

Digital Citizens and the Media: a Major Social and Democratic Issue

ERIKA CAMPELO

The way we communicate has changed dramatically in recent years with advances in information and communication technology (ICT), especially the Internet. Understanding the technological landscape in front of us is of utmost importance if we want to identify the power relations currently at play in the information sector.

The ways of using ICT are shaking up the mainstream media, both in how information is produced and in its dissemination: "They are forcing the mainstream media to redefine the way they work, what their position and what their role is."[1] Technological breakthroughs in the digital sector and the almost instantaneous availability of information are contributing to the emergence of a new media model for the 21st century.

In light of this shift, free media activists are encouraging citizens to empower themselves through distinctive and analytical information that sidetracks and criticises the dominant media 'system'. They are also developing media that represents a vehicle for popular education (television, newspapers and magazines, radio, websites and video). As building and maintaining democratic societies relies on being able to produce and access information, it's important to keep assessing the role the media (both new and traditional) plays in our societies.

The right to communication is the right of everyone to have access to a means of producing and disseminating information, to have the technical and material resources to be heard and to listen, and to have the knowledge to be autonomous and independent in their relation with the media. The right to communication

[1] Ambrosi Alain, Peugeot Valérie and Pimienta Daniel. 2005 *Word Matters: multicultural perspectives on information societies*, C & F Éditions.

is therefore more extensive than the right to information and than freedom of expression. It's a universal right, inseparable from other fundamental rights, and all the more significant in the age of the Internet. Technology has undeniably made it easier for individuals and social groups to produce and disseminate information about their actions and their commitments. It is also easier to access information voiced by people with similar concerns.

Yet with this changing technology, there is also the potential for increased media concentration and control, which could be used to consolidate established powers and existing inequalities. Because although the impact of ICTs on social relations is undeniable, and although their potential to enable humanity to progress is evident, these tools are already in the hands of the neoliberal system's major players, who use them to maximise profits. Like other economic sectors, ICTs are subject to multinationals' attempts to monopolise them, whether they be content providers (Google, Apple), social networks (Facebook) or online retailers (Amazon, Alibaba, etc.). ICTs are not exempt from the financial logic that reigns everywhere. The information they transmit is at risk of becoming standardised, as has been the case in the mainstream media for some time. They bring with them new technical possibilities in user surveillance and reader/client surveillance.

Yet the emergence of cooperative production processes and the creation of new media, free software and free protocols are proof that creativity and innovation can bypass economic interests (to some extent, at least) and that the creative forces of the imagination can also shape the future.

Since the 2000s, the Ritimo network has expanded its work on international solidarity to include a commitment to disseminating citizen information to a French-speaking public, through links and tools connecting the information sector with social movements, alternative media and NGOs all over the world. Its role is to enable the voices, analyses and ideas of civil society, minority groups, the socially or economically marginalised and those fighting for change and/or alternatives to reach a wider public and to be taken into account adequately by policymakers and governments.

This issue of Passerelle, published by Ritimo, with the support of the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation (FPH), seeks to give an overview of the wealth of innovating initiatives going on – both around the right to communication and in the world of IT networks. It brings together journalists, campaigners, academics, communication activists and hacktivists, IT and code lovers from all over the world. The thirty articles compiled in this issue offer new perspectives around the idea of information as a commons, in the fight against economic powers' attempts to commodify it. There are also concrete examples of open Internet initiatives, run on decentralised and neutral networks, which are created and controlled by the users themselves.

However, it's important to remember that technology alone will not lead to social change. This will only happen if technology is appropriated by each and every one of us and anchored in local knowledge and collective participation. It requires people to make a call on how and why this or that technology should be used and adapt it to the political and socio-economic context in which they live.

Faced with the multifaceted reality of the information age, free media activists (particularly those linked to the World Forum of Free Media), developers, NGO activists and people defending freedom of expression all over the world are endeavouring to anticipate risks, study and put forward alternatives so as to foster diversity, refuse being locked into a logic of non-reciprocity and uniformity, and confront the challenges of tomorrow's societies.

Many thanks to all the authors and people who contributed to this issue of the Passerelle Collection and a special thank to the translator, Susanna Gendall.

01

THE RIGHT TO COMMUNICATION: A CONCEPT ENCOMPASSING MULTIPLE REALITIES AND ISSUES

Information websites, blogs, commentary, tweets, chatrooms, videos, hyperlinks, open source content platforms, web documentaries, web radios... It is not easy to find one's way in the Internet galaxy. An abundance of information and opinion circulates the Net every day. And along with it, this galaxy faces pressures, escalating surveillance and even censorship from certain States or major communication groups. Snowden's revelations were proof of this as were the attempts of certain dictatorships to block Internet access during the Arab Spring mobilisations. Web giants like Apple, Google and Facebook, and some Internet service providers also discriminate between content for commercial, economic or political purposes.

In this context where overabundance of information faces the possibility of censorship, there is the fundamental right to information and communication. This right must guarantee the freedom to be informed and to express an opinion, and the right for every citizen to access these opinions and information without being discriminated against, except in the context of legislation governing the exercise of this freedom, for example in regards to breaches of privacy or racism. Independent journalists, non-profit media, hackers and 'open' Internet technicians play a major role in defending this right, which some countries recognise more than others.

Communication as a Right

LAURA DAUDÉN

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"The time will come when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will have to encompass a more extensive right than man's right to information, first laid down 21 years ago in Article 19. This is the right of man to communicate. It is the angle from which the future development of communications will have to be considered if it is to be fully understood (...)." Jean d'Arcy (1969:14)

Communication is currently a subject of great debate. The same can be said for the rights relating to it. Although this is not actually new – the political and ideological dimensions of the debate have been on agendas all around the world for at least four decades – the statement of the then director of the UN Radio and Visual Services, and its impact on the discussion regarding the limits of the right to freedom of expression, prove that the issue cannot be broached without recognising this fundamental difficulty.

Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) was enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and in many other international and regional human rights documents, such as the American Convention on Human Rights, freedom of expression has been referred to in a limited way, making it inadequate for dealing with the challenges of the information and knowledge society – as conceived by the United Nations Organisation for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO).

It is important to underline that this finding is not an attempt to make the core concept of freedom of expression any less important for consolidating democracy and achieving other human rights. On the contrary: the effort being made here is not merely to give new meaning to this guarantee but to increase the value of the many meanings and rights that go with it.



© Luc Legay

Poster for freedom of expression. Saint Augustin Metro stop, Paris. August, 2012.

Limits related to the right to freedom of expression, as it used to be dealt with, became more obvious in the 1960s and 1970s with the explosion of mass media (especially television), which changed the dimensions of the communication phenomenon and emphasised its multidirectional character: one was not only free to broadcast information but to seek, receive and share it as well. People began to understand that a broader definition was needed, which included the importance of communication for constructing social subjects and collective meanings, for creating a democratic State and for reducing inequalities and contributing to social change.

An advisory opinion issued by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR in 1985 demonstrates this trend: "When an individual's freedom of expression is unlawfully restricted, it is not only the right of that individual that is being violated, but also the right of all others to 'receive' information and ideas. The right protected by Article 13 consequently has a special scope and character, which are evidenced by the dual aspect of freedom of expression." (1985:9)

The IACHR goes even further and focuses on the conditions required for the mass media to "turn exercising freedom of expression into a reality", to respond adequately to this "mandate": "This means that the conditions of its use must conform to the requirements of this freedom, with the result that there must be, inter alia, a plurality of means of communication, the barring of all monopolies thereof, in whatever form, and guarantees for the protection of the freedom and independence of journalists." (1985:10)

A new right is born

It is important to mention that this discussion took place in the context of an important conceptual development within UNESCO, the UN agency most engaged

in building knowledge-based societies. It was here that, in building a "New World Information and Communication Order", countries of the north, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom, were pitted against Non-Aligned Countries, the so-called Third World.

As Alan Alegre and Sean O'Siochru (2005) explain, the conflict was based on three conclusions: the doctrine of a free flow of information was reinforcing the Western media's domination; the increasing concentration of media outlets was resulting in a greater foreign presence in smaller and poorer countries; and, lastly, the increasing importance of technologies controlled by the West was making it more difficult to access knowledge and means of production.

It was at this point, in the late 1970s, that the MacBride Commission was established, chaired by Sean MacBride, responsible for analysing communication problems in modern societies. Its report, presented at the UN General Assembly in 1980, became a benchmark for the budding global communication movement and unleashed a war of opinions on communication-related rights. This debate would later result in the United States leaving UNESCO.

The Commission's report states: "Communication needs in a democratic society should be met by the extension of specific rights such as the right to be informed, the right to inform, the right to privacy, the right to participate in public communication – all elements of a new concept, the right to communicate. In developing what might be called a new era of social rights, we suggest all the implications of the right to communicate be further explored." (1980: 265)

In addition to presenting concrete solutions for the imbalanced international flow of communication, Sean MacBride made a list of new communication-related rights and gave the growing communication movement a framework to refer to.

Despite instigating a new perspective, the report's relevance decreased in UNESCO, precisely because of pressure from the United States and the United Kingdom. Over time, the revolutionary strategies proposed by MacBride were replaced by more conservative approaches, such as digital inclusion and the democratisation of information. Gradually discussions shifted towards drawing up a list of rules based on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and later, based on the World Trade Organisation. Thus, due to political power, the UN went from using law to deal with issues of communication to using economics.

The situation in Brazil

As Brazil is an example of a country experiencing the distortions witnessed by MacBride, it can serve as a microcosm for analysing the difficulties of putting the transformative idea of the right to communicate into practice. The sector in Brazil

reflects historical social inequalities and a lack of modern structures of regulation. It is obvious, for example, that producing and disseminating information is so difficult due to the fact that the majority of broadcasting licences are in the hands of religious, political and agricultural oligarchies.

According to a study carried out by the Perseu Abramo Foundation in 2013, 82% of Brazilians watch open-air television on a daily basis. Radio has the second largest penetration rate, reaching 55% of the population every day. The prominence of these two platforms is juxtaposed against the concentration of the market: six companies share the open-air television spectrum between them. According to the Donos da Mídia project, Rede Globo alone accounts for 54% of the audience.

The international organisation Article 19, which advocates freedom of expression around the world, concluded in their last report, "The media landscape is concentrated in the hands of a few, in violation of the public's right to receive information on matters of public interest from a variety of sources" (2007: 3).

Another problem just as serious as that of concentrated power, with well-hidden networks of affiliates, is how much politics is embroiled in the media. This is due to the fact that there is no clear criteria for the concession of broadcasting frequencies. According to Donos da Mídia, 271 politicians are partners or directors of 324 media outlets in the country. Of these, 54% are mayors. Although Congress's legitimacy to grant concessions is recognised, it is noticeable that there is no regulating body that is independent of economic and political pressure, to centralise, monitor and establish clear criteria for the market. The Ministry of Communications, which guides decisions made by the Legislative, operates within parameters that are not particularly objective.

As stated by Toby Mendel and Eve Salomon, external consultants of UNESCO, in a report on Brazil, "the protagonists of this sector consolidated a system of practices which gives priority and preference to responding to their needs and objectives" (2011:10). "Obviously resulting in a system with powerful incumbents who are understandably wary of competition or of restrictions on their broadcasting operations." (Idem).

Article 19 comes to the same conclusion, stating: "The legal framework for the protection of freedom of expression, including freedom of information, is at best incomplete and at worst, seriously problematic. While the right to freedom of expression and access to information is protected by article 5 of the Brazilian Constitution, the Brazilian legislative bodies have failed to translate these rights into sufficiently robust laws to safeguard them properly." (2007: 2)

This situation is largely due to the fact that there is no legislation governing Articles 220, 221 and 22 of the Constitution. These are the articles which stipulate, for example, the responsibility of broadcasters to meet general content standards, respect ethical and social values and encourage independent production. It is only by enforcing

regulations in this regard that the country's communication practices, reflecting diversity and plurality, can be safeguarded – conditions which UNESCO defines as the existence of at least three systems (public, private and community-based), with a diversity of sources and with the creation of a regulatory body that is entirely free from economic and political pressures.

This means that the State must defend, ensure and regulate a collective need before it exerts any control over the sector. It is its responsibility to enable society to participate in defining guidelines for the sector. It also plays the role of agent in ensuring balanced content and distribution and in building a democratic social dialogue, as defined by María Pía Matta, chair of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters.

Brazil is not alone in its quest to limit cronyism in the communications sector. Other countries' experiences have been instrumental in providing inspiration in how they approach the issue. When Brazil achieves this, the media will be able to fulfil its constitutional duty and catalyse the expectations of a society that is increasingly aware of its power to change things.

Commentary

Although Brazil may not be the only country in the world facing challenges regarding the right to communication, the debate in Brazil is central not only to the budding and well-articulated communication movement, but to other groups and agendas which share the common backdrop of deep-rooted and historical social, racial and gender-based inequalities, which persist in the country.
One example is the feminist movement, which has for a long time been strategically working against the reproduction of violence against women in the media. Another example is social movements such as Mães de Maio, which addresses police violence against the black and underprivileged populations in poor suburbs.

Because major television networks have made these groups invisible, activists are working to find alternative ways of broadcasting their plans and ideas. They are also, in their quest for fairer communication, bringing together groups with different origins or agendas – which gives even more legitimacy and power to the movement as a whole.

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The New Regulations for the Right to Communication in Latin America

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New laws are passed on the continent, where social movements have pushed for the sector's democratisation

After the neoliberal onslaught of the 1990s, the turn of the century revealed a Latin America with an increasing presence of social movements, some of which were anti-capitalist. One example is the World Social Forum (WSF), which began in Brazil in 2001, bringing together organisations from all over the world. However, the counter-hegemonic struggle is up against a very unfair enemy: the concentrated power of the mass media. National oligarchies have built communication monopolies, aligned with international corporations that disseminate information and entertainment through neoliberal culture.

Creating a different world will only be possible with freedom of expression and the right to communication. As technology progresses, the number of alternatives also increases. Although the hegemonic media is becoming increasingly concentrated, independent global and continental communication networks are also being developed. In almost all Latin American countries, social mobilisation has resulted in the election of more progressive governments, which have been changing communication laws. Brazil is the exception. Its successive "leftwing" elected governments have still not had the courage to confront the media's oligopoly.



© Andres Azp

Press Conference held by students to protest against the closing of RCTV. (3rd May)

Venezuela is the first to take a stand

Venezuela was the first country to confront the monopoly of communication, following the election of Hugo Chávez in 1998. The Telecommunications Organic Law, approved in March 2000, established a new legal framework, consisting of 224 articles. This law was one of the main grievances of the Venezuelan elite, which organised the 2002 coup, with the support of companies such as Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV), the largest in the country at the time. The coup only lasted 48 hours, but it was a lesson in how media corporations are used as a means of propaganda, defending the bourgeoisie's interests. Hugo Chávez, with the support of community radio stations, regained control, certain of the need to make social communication more crosscutting and set up public broadcasters. In January 2005, his government passed the Law on Social Responsibility in Radio and Television. Two years later, he refused to renew the RCTV concession, replacing it with Televisión Venezolana Social (TVes). Illegal stations were shut down and more public broadcasters were set up. Social movements were quick to take over the communication space, creating many collectives over the last few years and using different outlets in addition to broadcasting (newspapers, magazines, books, cultural events, graffiti). Cátia TV, the main community television broadcaster, is located in a traditional working-class neighbourhood in the centre of Caracas. Cátia TV's slogan is "*Don't watch television, make it!*", urging citizens to produce content.

'Media Law' in Argentina is considered the best

In Argentina, social movements have also been fighting over the media. Although only two companies (Clarín and Telefónica) controlled the media monopolies, in 2004 the Coalition for Democratic Broadcasting was set up, as a response to social mobilisation. The forum brought together hundreds of public figures and political organisations, including trade union federations, universities, trade unions and social movements. The current law, passed in 2009, was based on the Coalition document "*21 Points for Democratic Broadcasting*". Specialists on the subject consider the "Media Law" as being the most advanced of its kind.

Because society played such a huge role in making legislative progress, President Cristina Kirchner presented the draft bill at a massive public event. Despite the president's political will, protests and demonstrations in response to proceedings by Grupo Clarín continued until October 2013, when the law was declared constitutional. One example of how the right to communication inspired a wealth of social movements in Argentina is that of Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, a renowned movement since the dictatorship. Their traditional Resistance March, which has taken place every year since 1981, was postponed to another date in December 2012 so that the Mothers could join in with the other movements and publicly express their support for the Media Law.

"There were six years of negotiating with grassroots movements, trade unions and in public hearings, which gives the law considerable social weight. It satisfied a wide range of social groups," says Gilberto Maringoni, a journalist, with a PhD in History from the University of São Paulo and a Professor of International Relations at the Federal University of ABC. "It is no longer possible for a television channel to buy a football championship," he says. "If an Argentinean wanted to watch his team play, he used to have to sign up to cable TV. Now state TV broadcasts the matches and the signal is open to anyone who wants to pick it up, which includes community television channels. This law is made to be incontestable!".

The changes are noticeable. Hundreds of communicators and new outlets have emerged over the last few years. By October 2013, 152 school radio stations had emerged as well as 45 university television broadcasters, 53 FM university radio stations, one open-air television channel and 33 radio stations owned by indigenous peoples, in addition to the largest increase in product content promoted by the state, according to a report written in the Argentinean newspaper *Página 12*. 1018 licenses have been granted for radio, open-air and paid television and 210 authorisations have been given to community radio stations.

Ecuador, Uruguay and Bolivia on the same path

In Ecuador, the election of the current president, Rafael Correa, led to the new Constitution, enacted in 2008. The constitution stands out "not only because it



© Carlos Reusser Monsalvez

Fresce in hommage to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo.

recognizes the right to participate in communication processes and to enable citizens to become more informed, but also because it establishes a third communication sector, community outlets", says Sally Burch, a journalist from the Latin American Information Agency (ALAI). "The bill is the result of more than two years of public hearings, debates, proposals and actions by social organisations and bodies, and many other contributions, making this law one of the most debated in the country". The country that granted political asylum to the founder of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange, approved its media law in June 2013, which the opposition refers to as the "Gag Law". With norms similar to that of Argentina's law, the Ecuadorian law promotes diversity, reflecting the country's multicultural vibrancy, with 14 nationalities and peoples.

Bolivia, which was re-founded in 2009 by president Evo Morales as the "Plurinational State", enacted its new communication law in 2011. It guarantees indigenous peoples broadcasting slots and includes a programme for funding "the expansion of socially-relevant information". Last December in Uruguay, the Chamber of Deputies approved the Bill of Audiovisual Communication Services, an initiative launched by the government of José Mujica, who sees it as an improvement to democracy. The opposition, which was indignant about the country's reforms, questions the fact that this law is being put forward in an election year, while being discussed in the Senate. And in 2014, Peru began disputing media concentration and control. This was backed by the president himself, who was unhappy about the El Comercio group increasing media control, raising their share to 70%. In his government plan, Ollanta Humala had already included a discussion on a regulatory communications framework.

In all these countries, the dismantling of media corporations has faced vehement opposition from private media outlets. The Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) has condemned the new laws, one after the other. "I believe that the main point of all of these laws is to highlight that communication is a right and not just a business", says Pedro Ekman from the Intervozes Collective. "This is absolutely revolutionary in Latin American tradition, which differs from European tradition. It has always had private communication as an insoluble truth. Public and community-based channels are gaining ground. This right used to be primarily given only to those whose aim was to make profits from their communication", he says.

Richer countries, bigger challenges

The greatest challenges to democratising communication have come up in the region's countries with the highest GDP: Mexico and Brazil. In both countries the fight is an old one and has inspired organisations such as the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), the Mexican Association for the Right to Information (AMEDI) and the National Forum for Communication Democratisation (FNDC), in Brazil.

Since the 2012 election campaign in Mexico, awareness of duopoly TV Azteca and Televisa's manipulation of information appears to be reaching new sectors of the population. A movement opposing the candidacy of the current president, Peña Nieto, emerged and grew to considerable dimensions when the issue of democracy in communication was hailed as one of its key themes. The youth movement #YoSoy132! and organisations that historically worked on this matter, drafted the "Minimal Requirements Document", with ten fundamental points for democratising the media.

What was surprising was that measures announced by the president in March to reform telecommunications laws, directly affected Televisa, which had supported his campaign. The monopoly of the world's richest man, Carlos Slim, might be forced to share its infrastructure and lose the right to exclusively broadcast events like the World Cup and the Olympics. The bill means television networks and mobile phone services will be open to foreign investment, which appears to be its main objective. This aspect is indeed consistent with Peña Nieto's conservative policy.

In Brazil, the law dates back to 1962! It is politically and technologically outdated, and amounts to giving monopolies total ownership of the sector. The advanced Constitution of 1988 contains articles guaranteeing democratisation of the media, which have never been regulated. After years of society demanding accountability, a long-awaited National Communication Conference was held in 2009, only to have its resolutions ignored by the government. A wide front

of organisations and movements built the campaign "To Express Freedom" which, since May 2013, has been collecting signatures for a Popular Initiative Bill for a Democratic Media.

The campaign is supported by hundreds of organisations and movements, including the largest trade union federation CUT, which has prioritised the subject.

Commentary

This year, Venezuela once again became the subject of a global and regional media war in Latin America. In Brazil, press coverage is severely biased; it is pure propaganda, never journalism. In election year, the oligopoly of major newspapers, radio and television networks are already on the campaign, with little regard for how accurate the information is. At least, in many of Latin America's countries new voices are being heard in the media, demonstrating that there are two sides to every story, bringing peoples and opinions out of obscurity and opening up different ways of seeing the world.

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Communication: Prisoner of War

RITA FREIRE

Journalist and representative of International Ciranda of Shared Communication within the World Social Forum International Council. She is also Vice-President of the Brazil Communication Company (EBC) and a facilitator at the World Forum of Free Media (WFFM).

Blocking Internet access is the first concern of governments in countries mired in conflicts, whether they be popular uprisings or ethnic and religious extremism. A common fear amongst governments and authoritarian groups is the power of information circulating in distributed networks.

It was a year of lost battles for the Turkish government, when it attempted to impede the avalanche of information that was inspiring activist movements in the street. According to the government itself, in June 2013 a department in Ankara had already collected five million messages in its attempt to get to the bottom of who was responsible for the country's protests. The newspaper Hurriyet reported that the Ministry of Justice was going to draft a bill to deal with Internet crimes.

At the time, Turkey's Minister of the Interior, Muammer Guler said ,"we have a report on the people responsible for provoking citizens via Twitter and Facebook by manipulating them and making false claims, resulting in actions that could threaten public safety and property", explicitly referring to the publicising of protests on networks.

Network users ignored threats of repression and the circuits of information became increasingly ramified. Compromising conversations began leaking to the public[1]. Feeling intimidated, in March 2014, the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan ordered Twitter and YouTube to be blocked. By doing this, he created a moment that was ideal for testing out John Gilmore's (the creator of Electronic Frontier Foundation

[1] A recording was leaked on a confidential meeting in which four high-ranking Turkish public officials, including the Foreign Affairs Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, and the head of secret services, Hakan Fidan, spoke about the possibility of military intervention in Syria.



© Ian Brown

A variation on the Twitter logo during protest in Turkey.

and one of the GNU[2] project's participants) assertion: "The Net interprets censorship as damage and routes around it". This is what Turkish Internet users demonstrated.

Virtual Private Networks (VPN) and online anonymity software Tor were used to get around censorship, while alternative access codes were sprayed on walls. According to Google, visits to the search engine fell but did not disappear. In addition, there was increasing pressure from Internet users and businesses in the form of legal proceedings.

Stupid, and uncontrollable

In power since 2002, the Prime minister was forced to back down following the ruling given by the Constitutional Court, the highest judicial body in Turkey, which suspended the ban on Twitter for violating freedom of expression. Another ruling made by a court in Ankara ordered access to YouTube to be reinstated. The Prime minister did not hide his discomfort. "We must apply the rulings", he acknowledged, but added, "I do not respect the verdict", alleging this was an offence to national values. And what exactly are these values?

Centralised, decentralised or distributed are adjectives used for different kind of networks, which are as different from each other as formal or non-formal systems of power. The Internet is the third kind, able to function without a central command, or intermediary sub-commands.

[2] https://www.gnu.org/gnu/thegnuproject.html

The person who best defined the Internet's vocation for disobedience is the Internet guru, Craig Burton, when he called the Internet stupid. The Net does not understand principles of hierarchy, which is what sustains authoritarian governments. Burton describes it as "a hollow sphere comprised entirely of ends". There is no command centre, and that's where the secret lies.

"Take the value out of the centre and you enable an insane flowering of value among the connected end points. Because, of course, when every end is connected, each to each and each to all, the ends aren't endpoints at all," say the authors of the manifesto "World of Ends", Doc Searls and David Weinberger.

"The Internet doesn't know lots of things a smart network like the phone system knows: the notion of identity, permissions, priorities, etc". The Internet in its current form, the authors say, only knows one thing: "This bit packet has to be transported from one end of the network to another". Therefore, "if a router fails, packets route around it, meaning that the Net stays up". And that's not all. It grows, connecting people and things. "Thanks to its stupidity, the Net welcomes new devices and people, so it grows quickly and in all directions. It's also easy for architects to incorporate Net access into all kinds of smart devices – camcorders, telephones, sprinkler systems – that live at the Net's ends".

In the dark, at the mercy of ethnic cleansing

The war against Internet freedom has been a common weapon in regimes and governments of countries in conflict. It suggests there is an incompatibility between centralised power and distributed networks, and also indicates there is a direct relationship between the right to communicate and the fight for democracy. The lack of access to communication not only maintains domestic subordination of the population, but exposes it to external threats and other violence in the struggle for power.

One has to ask how the population of Iraq, despite being terrified by the threat of ethnic, ideological and religious massacres, was left in the dark regarding communication because of a decision made by the government, which should theoretically be the guardian of democracy. This is what happened in June 2014, when the Iraqi government ordered mobile phone operators to block mobile data, including instant messaging services. It also banned the use of VPNs, which is difficult to control, as users can access them from outside the country.

Iraq is not experiencing a kind of Arab Spring, such as the uprisings which overthrew dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt. It is not a question of a self-organised popular uprising. The crisis emerged out of the bloody war initiated by the United States after September the 11th, which removed the Sunnis from power, and which has recently taken a frightening turn, with the growth of a yet unknown power. The government faces groups of armed extremists, led by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant



Protest, Tunis, May 2011.

© Scossar Gilbert

(ISIL), which violently occupied large swathes of the north of the country using cruel methods, intimidating governments in the region and terrifying the population.

Fearing the enemy would use the networks, the Shiite government clung onto control of communication as a safeguard, while also denying the threatened population the possibility of being connected. According to the news agency Reuters, the companies Iraq Telecommunications and Post Company (ITPC), which own almost all landline networks outside of Kurdistan, received orders to block access to certain social networks, including Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Skype. This encouraged many Iraqis to access applications via VPNs, which the government then also decided to ban.

Failed attempts at censorship

Censoring social networks has not been a successful self-defence strategy of authoritarian regimes. In January 2011, with the winds of revolution blowing from Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak's Egypt attempted to isolate itself from the global network used to mobilise the popular occupation of Tahrir Square. The government managed to deactivate more than 3.5 thousand BGP (Border Gateway Protocol[3]) routes, which linked the backbones of ten of the country's major service providers to the rest of the world and to social networks. It was a question of days, or hours, before the government would collapse.

Touched by the Arab Spring in June 2011, Syria attempted to do the same, removing 40 of the 59 Internet routes connecting servers in Syria to the international circuit,

[3] BGP, or Border Gateway Protocol, is a one of the main Internet protocols, connecting backbones, the main network servers on the global network of computers

according to the network analysis company Renesys. At the time, the television channel Al Jazeera reported that broadband, 3G, DSP and dial-up connections had been blocked. According to Renesys, all the traffic of the country's Internet providers depends on SyriaTel, a state-owned telecommunications company, controlled by the government. Another blackout occurred in November 2012. But nothing actually protected Bashar Al-Assad.

The situation in Syria is currently deteriorating, going beyond confrontations between government forces and the Rebel Army. The threat comes from attacks and advances made by ISIL. The group wants to create an Islamic caliphate in the region of Iraq and Syria, in accordance with Sharia Law. ISIL is fighting against Shiite dominance in Iraq and Alawite dominance in Syria, and aims to make its way via parts of Lebanon and Turkey. It also has in its sights the Kurds living in the region comprising Iraq, Syria, Iran and Turkey, who are fighting for the right to their own identity, culture and political life. The territories in question are of enormous geopolitical interest because of their resources and logistical advantages in energy exploration and distribution.

A far larger blackout

The interest in promoting blackouts in the Middle East go beyond simple explanations, such as restraining uprisings. The media is always targeted by armies. In June, an Israeli siege of the West Bank led to, in only 10 days, 5700 arrests. During this offensive, the army invaded the building of the company Palmedia in Ramallah, destroying the offices of Arab media. The agency Russia Today, whose offices were also invaded, said that the attack was carried out under the false accusation that Palmedia had been cooperating with the Hamas movement. Palmedia offers its satellite services to many other companies, but, interestingly does not serve the Palestinian channel Al Aqsa, which is located somewhere else and uses the services of Transmedia. The company that was invaded is a major provider to all of the Middle East, serving large media outlets such as Al Manar, Al Maydeen and France 24, and also served the BBC Arabic channel.

Russia Today's correspondent in Ramallah, Yafa Staty, said that the military caused the Internet signal and video archives to be lost. Other material was completely destroyed and computers and hard drives confiscated.

Behind the censored media are journalists, who are being increasingly targeted. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), two-thirds of murders in 2013 took place in the Middle East. Working in Syria claimed the lives of at least 29 journalists over the same period, bringing the total number of people who have died in the conflict to 63, including some who died on the Lebanese or Turkish borders. Amongst the victims is Yara Abbas, a correspondent of the pro-government television channel Al-Ikhbariya, who died when her team's vehicle was attacked by rebel snipers in the city of Al-Quseir. According to a survey by the CPJ[4], a further 60

[4] Committer to Protect Journalist. www.cpj.org

journalists were kidnapped in 2013, almost half of whom have disappeared.

At least ten journalists were killed in Iraq in the last four months of 2013. Unidentified men opened fire against cameraman Mohammed Ghanem and correspondent Mohammed Karim al-Badrani, from the independent television channel Al-Sharqiya, while they were filming the preparations for the religious holiday Eid al-Adha in Mosul, in October. It is unclear why they were targeted; the broadcaster has enraged Iraqi authorities and anti-government activists alike.

In Egypt, six journalists were killed in 2013, three of them in a single day, on August 14th, when they were reporting on attacks by the Egyptian security forces against demonstrators supporting the deposed President Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The old habit of silencing people

Controlling information is a practice inherent to regimes maintained by force and examples of it will continue to repeat themselves for some time, wherever coups occur. The military junta which took power from the civilian government in Thailand, following a coup on May 22nd 2014, immediately censored television and radio stations, including broadcasts by international channels like the BBC and CNN. At the same time in Ukraine, YouTube itself closed accounts of the activist channel Anna-News, with 100 thousand followers, for uploading a video of a journalist being murdered, and those of the channel Newsfront TV, for broadcasting news about the elections.

As the Turkish Prime minister said, when protesting against lifting the ban on social networks in the country "Twitter, YouTube and Facebook are commercial companies selling a product (…) everyone has the right to buy or not buy their products". Like companies, they can also be forced by their most powerful customers to impose censorship.

Maintaining the Internet in its current form requires global agreements, based on the principles of freedom of expression, neutrality and privacy, as suggested by the members of NETmundial in Brazil.

For the authors of "World of Ends", the web "doesn’t belong to any one person or group. Not the incumbent companies that provide the backbone", nor the "Internet service providers (ISPs) that provide our connections", nor the "hosting companies that rent us servers", nor the "industry associations that believe their existence is threatened by what the rest of us do on the Net". Nor does the Internet belong to "any government, no matter how sincerely it believes that it’s just trying to keep its people secure and complacent."

Technological Sovereignty: a Necessity and a Challenge.

PATRICE RIEMENS
Geographer, cultural activist and advocate of free software. He is a member of the Dutch hacker group Hippies from Hell.

Who has not yet realized, after "Snowden" and his revelations, that our dear "cyberspace" is no longer in the hands of its users and, alas, has not been for a long time, but that it has become a high-risk space under heavy surveillance? Users, seemingly free to move about as they please and provided with countless facilities – often '"or free" – have become captive subjects at once hostages, guinea pigs and suspects.

Control over the Internet by state or commercial powers (or, more frequently, a combination of both) seems totally unrestrained. And when vectors and platforms are "proprietary", i.e., owned by players who prioritise their own interests, often at the expense of users, unrestrained is exactly what it is. While the impact of the Internet on our lives is becoming increasingly significant[1], there is a need to raise awareness about these urgent issues and ask the critical question: how does the Internet work, and, more importantly, for whom?

Fortunately, this awareness does exist, and it existed long before the development of the Internet. But its impact is limited because it is still only shared by a relatively small number of individuals and groups, and because it is confronted with the aggressive lobbying of much stronger established powers. The flagship, so to speak, of this movement is free software and its many derivatives. Not only on a technical level, but also, and more importantly, for the ideals it represents: awareness, personal appropriation, autonomy and sovereignty. Indeed, not all is technology, and technology is not everything!

[1] As German essayist Sascha Lobo recently wrote: "In Germany there are two kinds of people: those whose lives have been transformed by the Internet, and those who do not realize that their lives have been transformed by the Internet." (http://bit.ly/1h1bDy1).

It is essential to approach technological sovereignty from a much broader perspective than that of computer technology, or even just technology. Ignoring today's intertwined environmental, political, and economic crises[2], seeking to resolve them (either separately or together) by technology alone, is not an option. Clearly, technological sovereignty on its own will not divert us from our inexorable course ... straight into the wall.

We cannot continue on a path of all-encompassing economic growth as we have been up until now. We need to stop here, and even deliberately initiate "degrowth". Otherwise it will force itself on us in much more unpleasant conditions. We must also assess the various solutions put forward for (re)conquering the individual and collective autonomy which we have not only lost, but handed over to economic and political players who want us to believe they have our interests in mind and that their motives are benign, honest and legitimate.

Unfortunately, information and communication technology (ICT) developers – probably because they are still predominantly male – tend to work in isolation, without regard to their dependence on the countless human relationships and natural resources that make up our world and our society. "We need to re-invent the network", said Tim Pritlove in his opening speech of the 30th Congress of the Chaos Computer Club, held in late December 2013. And he added, to a crowd of enthusiastic activists and hackers: "and you are the ones who can do it!". He is probably right in both respects, but to leave it just at that would be to believe in a "nerd supremacy"[3] focused on purely technological solutions.

There is no doubt that it has become indispensable to rebuild networks from scratch so that they serve the interests of the commons rather than those of exclusive groups or oppressors. We're all for re-invention, but not just anyhow. We must go well beyond "technological fix" type solutions, which merely address the effects, not the causes. A dialectical – and dialogic – approach is needed to develop community-based, participatory technologies which allow their users to break away from dependence on commercial providers, as well as from general surveillance by state authorities obsessed with control and punishment. But what then is this technological sovereignty that we hope to build, and what does it consist of?

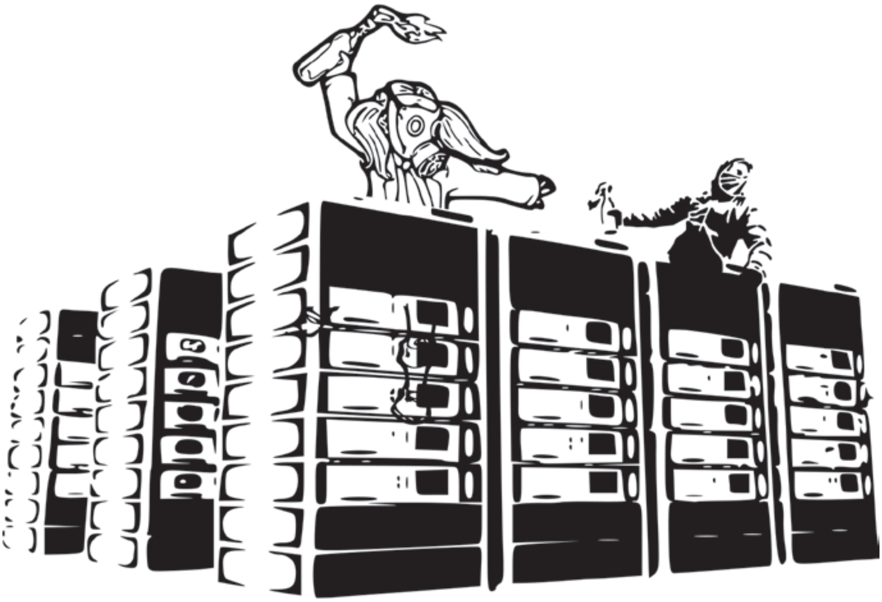
One possible approach would be to look at the sovereignty in our own daily live against the powers that try to control us. This nascent form of sovereignty could be interpreted as "the right to be left alone"[4]. Everyone knows that this right is systematically violated in the realm of information and communication technologies.

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[2] Which French philosopher Paul Virilio calls "*the integral accident*"

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nerd

[4] In the United States, the concept of the 'right to be left alone' is seen as a foundation of the right to privacy; cf. Warren & Brandeis (1890). But caution is required: this 'sovereignty in one's own sphere of life' was also conceptualised at about the same time in the Netherlands by Calvinist politician Abraham Kuyper – a political tradition which led straight to Apartheid in South Africa…



Foockinho (CC-BY-SA)

The article on "Technological Sovereignty", edited by Alex Haché[5], aims to take stock of the initiatives, methods and ways (non-proprietary and, wherever possible, self-managed) which help us to protect our "sphere of life" as much as possible. Autonomous servers, decentralized networks, encryption, pairing, digital alternative currencies, knowledge sharing, co-operative meeting and working spaces: there is a wide range of projects which already point the way towards technological sovereignty. The effectiveness of these alternatives greatly depends on the kind of practice(s) they promote. In this respect, the following aspects should be taken into account:

- **Temporality**. "Taking your time" is essential. We must break free from of the logic of "ever more, ever faster", the smoke and mirrors of commercial technology. One can expect "sovereign" technologies to be slower and perhaps even less efficient than commercial technologies, but this does not necessarily mean less satisfying.

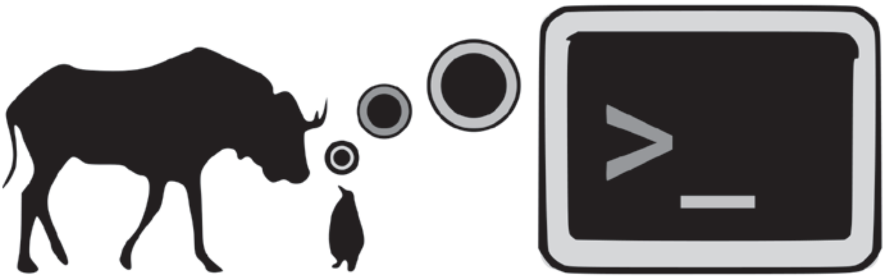
- **"We"**. "Sovereign" technologies must be open, participatory, egalitarian, community-managed and cooperative. They are based on horizontal governance mechanisms among very diverse stakeholders. Closure, hierarchies (often described as "meritocracy") and selfish individualism are lethal for them. The distinction between 'experts' and 'users' should vanish as much as possible.

- **Responsibility**. Achieving sovereignty requires a lot from those who share this objective. Each member of the group must take responsibility for the way

[5] Article on Technological Sovereignty, coordinated by Alex Haché and Published by Ritimo. www.plateforme-echange.org

he or she develops and uses tools. The famous questions "Who? What? Where? When? How? How much? And Why?"[6] must be kept in mind at all times, and must be answered adequately.

• **An exchange-based economy**. The services "offered" by the Internet heavyweights are based on the principle "it's free, so you're the product". Citizen initiatives, on the other hand, are often marginalised into the "gift economy" in the form of volunteering that is actually more or less forced. We must find models that offer fair compensation for "immaterial workers" and make users pay their fair share.



• **Ecology and Environment**. Technology sovereignty implies, of course, protecting the environment and using non-renewable resources sparingly. Few people realise how energy-intensive IT is, and how many raw materials it requires. These raw materials are often extracted and the devices often manufactured under appalling labour conditions[7].

Thus, it is evident that sovereign technologies will be confronted with many limitations and that there is no silver bullet in this area. Even if successful, they will not provide us with a utopia. Which is not an invitation to give up. Quite the opposite. Modesty and lucidity, combined with reflection, can move mountains. It is up to you, dear reader, to reflect upon your own role and commit yourself to it, armed with intelligence and confidence. And who knows what unwavering and contagious enthusiasm can achieve...

[6] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Ws
[7] Fairphone, the 'Fair' cellular phone, could be seen as a first step in the area of mobile telecommunication. See: http://www.fairphone.com.

Free Internet and Mesh Networks

BENJAMIN CADON

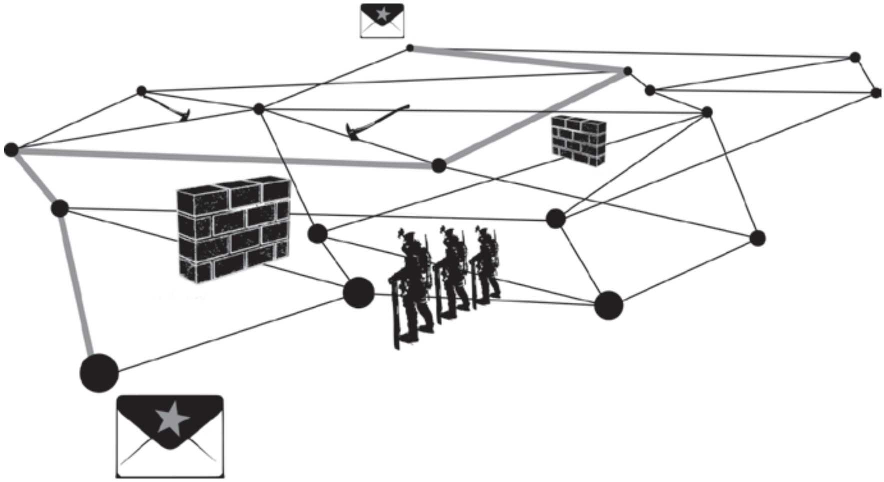
Artist and coordinator of Labomedia-mediahackerfablabspace, a non-profit organisation invested in digital art, based in Orléans (France).

The question of technological sovereignty is a pertinent one when addressing the issue of free Internet access, whether it be for simple interpersonal communication, file-sharing, or using web applications for resource-sharing or collective organisation. This article will primarily discuss the issue from a "network" perspective, looking first at worldwide developments and then moving on to local initiatives.

We can start by looking at the history of the Internet, which began in the United States, was transformed by the military, then developed by academics and IT geeks before spreading over the planet… raising the issue of its governance. Since the last World Summit on the International Society (WSIS), which was held in Tunis in 2005, Internet governance is now orchestrated by the Internet Governance Forum under the aegis of the United Nations Organisation (UNO).

The fact that this is a global organisation should not mask the fact that, from a technical point of view, there are many elements within the network that have remained under American hegemony. One example is that of ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers), a non-profit Californian legal company supervised by the United States Department of Commerce, which manages DNS root name servers (the "org", "com", "net"), and assigns "IP" address classes[1]. These addresses identify every computer present on the network. There have been several initiatives attempting to create a decentralised DNS system

[1] A 'public' IP address is what enables a computer to connect to the Internet and to speak the same language (TCP/IP protocol) as its fellow devices, whether they be servers, personal computers, mobile terminals or other 'communication' devices. DNS servers are used to change these IP address into domain names to make servers more accessible to humans and search engines.



(P2P DNS), including that of Peter Sunde, co-founder of The Pirate Bay [2], which have not yet been widely implemented. "DNS censorship" is another possibility that should be taken into consideration. This was the case when American services intervened to shut down Mégaupload. The "Governing by Networks" chart devised by French art collective "Bureau d'études" also underlines this aspect[3].

Why does Net neutrality need to be protected?

Let's now take a glimpse at the numerous treaties and international, European and national attempts (voluntary or not) to impede Internet neutrality and to "filter" it (TAFTA, CETA, ACTA, SOPA, PIPA, International Telecommunication Union regulations, DADVSI in Europe, Ley Sinde in Spain, LOPSI and Hadopi in France, among others). According to Quadrature du Net, "Net neutrality is a founding principle of the Internet which guarantees that telecom operators remain mere transmitters of information and do not discriminate between different users, their communication or content accessed. It ensures that all users, whatever their resources, access the same and whole network"[4]. For a number of reasons, many of which are distorted[5], these treaties and bills are attempting to enforce regulations which oblige service providers and publishers to limit access to certain Internet content and network resources, to filter content and ultimately discriminate between them.

[2] See article by Stéphane Bortzmeyer, "Un DNS en pair-à-pair ?" www.bortzmeyer.org
[3] http://bureaudetudes.org
[4] www.laquadrature.net/en/Net_neutrality
[5] 'Distorted' refers to the fact that crimes against Net neutrality are often disguised under the pretext of protecting intellectual property and copyright, preventing terrorism and extremist behaviour, preventing child and sexual abuse and other predatory behaviour on the Net. We are not saying that these problems don't exist, but that trying to resolve them by restricting freedom and neutrality on the Net, one of its founding principles, represents a major mistake.

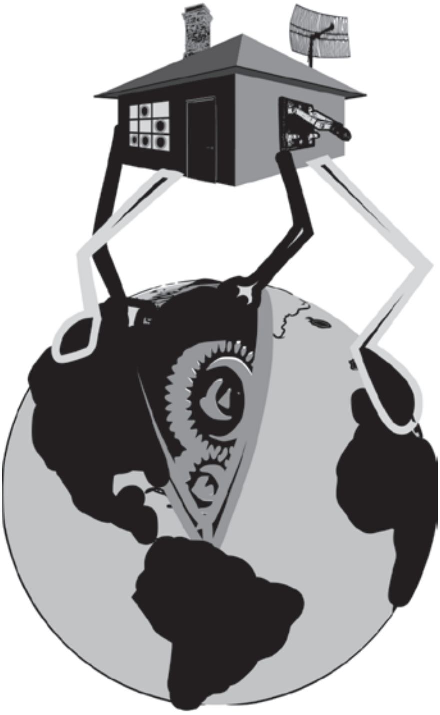
The strategic-commercial interests of service providers is another element that affects free, unrestricted access to the Internet. With technologies like Deep Packet Inspection (DPI), service providers are able to prioritise certain content over others. DPI involves "opening" all the packets that transport data exchanged with servers or other users to evaluate the content and either let the packet quickly pass, or reroute it to a dead end or to eavesdroppers for analysis. This is appealing to commercial service providers for a number of reasons: there is the potential to offer several connection speeds, so as to limit the speed of the more high-bandwidth, less lucrative services such as YouTube, or charge for privileged access to these services in order to guarantee the high-quality broadband flux that enables video viewing on the Internet and the good quality of IP-based phone services. It should be noted that manufacturers of digital weapons use these same DPI technologies to put countries in revolt under surveillance (i.e., Libya, assisted by technicians of French company Amesys Bull[6] and its Eagle software).

Net neutrality: a principle that should be safeguarded from a techno-political perspective

Certain countries are taking tentative initiatives to ensure free, unrestricted access to the Internet, beginning with Chile[7]. In the Netherlands, the Parliament adopted a law on Net neutrality in early May 2012[8], but Europe seems to skirt around the issue[9]. In some countries, public authorities can legally take on the role of Internet service provider so as to offer an affordable quality service for underprivileged sectors of the population (such as the *Régie Communale du Câble et d'Electricité de Montataire in France*) or those living in unprofitable areas without any Internet access ("Notspots"). To this day, at least in France, public authorities have been quicker to hand over broadband network development to the usual commercial players than seize the opportunity to concretely address the future of the Internet as a commons.

Public interest groups have been campaigning for lawmakers to uphold this principle for some time. This is one of the priorities of *La Quadrature du Net*, which defines itself as "a non-profit association that defends the rights and freedom of citizens on the Internet. It advocates for an adaptation of French and European legislation to bring it closer to the founding principles of the Internet, most notably the free circulation of knowledge. To this end, Quadrature du Net engages in public-policy debates concerning, for instance, freedom of expression, copyright, regulation of telecommunications and online privacy. The group also aims to foster a better understanding of legislative processes among citizens.

[6] See article 'Amesys et la surveillance de masse: du fantasme à la dure réalité', www.reflets-info (in French).
[7] http://www.camara.cl/prensa/noticias_detalle.aspx?prmid=38191
[8] See article by Guillaume Champeau: 'La neutralité du net devient uneobligation légale aux Pays-Bas', www.numerama.com (in French).
[9] See article 'EU Telecom Regulators, Wake Up Call on the Net Neutrality',www.laquadrature.net



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Through the dissemination of specific and pertinent information and tools, it hopes to encourage citizen participation in public debates on rights and freedom in the digital age"[10].

Communities for a free, open and accessible Internet

There are different topologies of organisations, NGOs and communities which are actively and concretely fighting for Net neutrality. They can be technically differentiated depending on the proposed mode of access: with a router to connect to a cabled network or with a Wifi system adapted to a mesh network which may itself also be interconnected to the Internet. Technically speaking, "Assymetric Digital Subscriber Line" versus Wi-Fi, a free band of the electromagnetic spectrum.

Asymmetrical digital subscriber lines

One example in France is the French Data Network (FDN[11]), established in 1992 under the 1901 French law governing non-profit organisations, with the objective to ensure everybody affordable access to tools used by others since the early eighties. Services provided by FDN include email, news, access to a number of software and documentation archives and Internet network engines.

One of the FDN's assets is the diversity of its members which includes both seasoned, technically-equipped cybercitizens and members with broader areas of interest (music, law, education, graphic design, etc.). It advocates an Internet focussed on quality, both in its service and its content, and faithful to its founding ethical principles. With these objectives in mind, the FDN has set up a Federation of Non-Profit Internet Service Providers (FFDN), which currently has 26 members[12] and seeks to foster exchanges on common technical and political issues.

Creating a DIY non-profit Internet Service Provider (ISP)[13] seems relatively simple

[10] www. laquadrature.net/en/who-are-we
[11] www.fdn.fr/
[12] www.ffdn.org/en/members-ffdn
[13] See FAI map in the article "Federating Do-It-Yourself ISPs fromaround the worl", www.ffdn.org/en

("How to begin making my own ISP?"[14]), especially when organisations like the FFDN are there to support and encourage this initiative. There is just the "local loop" issue, the final kilometres of cables or soon-to-be optic fibres which reach our homes and which are owned by a limited number of operators one has to make concessions to. Wireless networks are one way of getting around this issue.

Wi-Fi, a free electromagnetic spectrum band

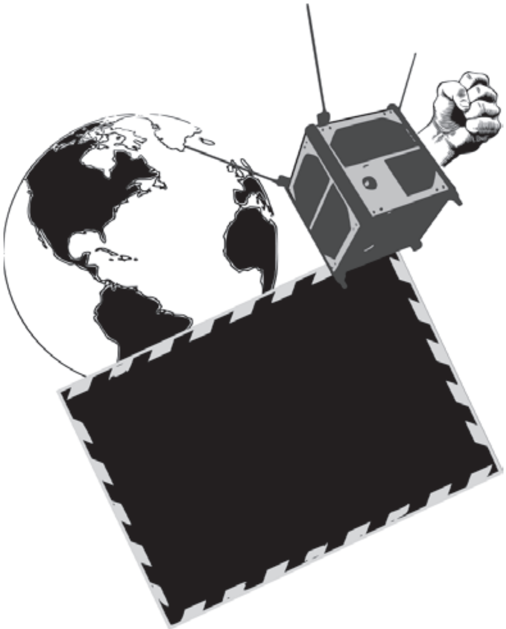
As legislation evolved in many countries in the early 2000s, it became possible to use wireless devices freely, without a licence. Many countries limited the authorised speeds and opened "channels" around the so-called "Industrial, Scientific and Medical" (ISM)[15] band of frequency between 2.4 and 2.4835 GHz. In some countries frequencies of around 5GHz can be used.

Since then, Wi-Fi communities have been emerging, both in cities where they are freer, mutually-beneficial and more autonomous in regards to service providers, and in rural areas – "Notspots" where there is no Internet connection and which are deemed "unprofitable" by public/private operators. In Europe, there is Freifunk[16] (Germay), FunkFeuer[17] (Austria) and Guifi.net[18] (Catalonia), to mention just a few[19]. Their size varies considerably, from just a few users in isolated areas to thousands of nodes in denser areas, proportionate to the city, region or country.

To put it simplistically, participants set up an access point and relay within a mesh network by adequately configuring a Wi-Fi router, and this network is connected to the Internet via one or several personal or shared access points, called "dorsals", which connect zones separated by up to several kilometres, where another micro-network can be set up. It is thus a matter of distributing access to the Internet and to local IT resources (websites, email services, telecommunication tools, etc.) in the most decentralised way possible, i.e., as offered on servers directly hooked up to one or several nodes of this electromagnetic fabric.

One of the oldest Wi-Fi communities in Europe, Freifunk, ("free radio"), established in 2002, has created its own router operating system, FreiFunk Firmware, and its own routing protocol, B.A.T.M.A.N.[20], which is currently a benchmark all over the world for establishing mesh networks and optimising packet circulation. It has also been instrumental in setting up an international network of communities sharing the same values, which resemble those of free software, with

[14] See article "Comment devenir son propre FAI", http://blog.spyou.org (in French)
[15] https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bande_industrielle,_scientifique_et_m%C3%A9dicale
[16] http://freifunk.net/
[17] www.funkfeuer.at/
[18] http://guifi.net/
[19] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_wireless_community_networks_by_region
[20] www.open-mesh.org/projects/open-mesh/wiki



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the collective desire to widely distribute and "acentralise" network resources – or commons – that should be accessible to everyone.

The price drop in Wi-Fi routers (made in RPC[21]) has encouraged this type of development, which some see as the future of the Internet: a decentralised, rhizomatic network, with a multi-faceted and common intelligence, which can be adapted as much as possible to the socio-techno-ecological potential specific to each context. There is, however, much to be debated over the question of "freeing the airwaves"[22], as private operators also benefit from their 'freeness' whether for some so-called "intelligent object" or as a way to use your home's Internet connection as a mobile phone thoroughfare. This frequency band is already referred to by some as a "trash band". But we can also see this electromagnetic resource as a commons, by putting civil society at the centre of the sharing process, away from governments' and companies' control over airwaves. Organisations like "Wireless Commons" have produced a manifesto and listed the common principles shared by these organisations and a Wireless Commons License[23] (published by the founder of Guifi.net) has been around since 1995.

"Artistackers" experiment with other "networks"

Below are some initiatives that address the problem of technological sovereignty and the question of accessing a system of communication and exchange that is open, accessible and anonymous.

• *Self-hosting workshops*

In hackspaces, Media labs, and other spaces where technology can be reclaimed and re-imagined, regular workshops are held on how to become more autonomous in IT: how to set up one's own home email/web server, how to encrypt communi-

[21] See the article by Elleflane on "Free Hardware" in this booklet.
[22] Félix Treguer and Jean Cattan's appeal for the freedom of airwaves "Le spectre de nos libertés" http://owni.fr/2011/05/07/le-spectre-de-nos-libertes/
[23] See https://guifi.net/ca/CXOLN

cations, bypass filtering systems, avoid, wherever possible, eavesdroppers, how to manage one's own personal data, computer security, etc.

• *Battle meshes*

"Wireless battle meshes"[24] are also organised in the same kind of spaces: wireless communication experts get together and, in the form of a game, test out different protocols and try to develop a mesh network's operation and configuration. It's a way to gain experience and expertise and talk to other participants confronted with similar technical issues.

• "*Qaul.net*" *(Christoph Wachter and Mathias Jud)*

Qaul.net implements an open communication principle, in which wireless-enabled computers and mobile devices can directly form a spontaneous network enabling users to exchange text messages, share files and make voice calls without "going through" the Internet and cellular networks. This "artistic" project was conceived as a response to communication "blackouts" – either imposed by governments in the grip of a revolt or due to natural disasters affecting network infrastructures.

• "*Batphone*" *or* "*Serval Mesh*"

This project aims to turn any phone equipped with Wi-Fi into a Wi-Fi phone i.e., a means of communication which, by using an existent wireless network infrastructure, allows people to communicate without a SIM card and without having to go through an "operator[25].

• "*Deaddrop*" *(Aram Barthol)*

A USB key is hidden in a wall somewhere, the location of which is then mapped on the artist's site[26], or shared with friends. The name comes from the deaddrop method of espionage, so valuable to generations of spies. It's a way of creating a space for sharing files anonymously, disconnected from the Internet. There are "deaddrops" just about all over the world and currently they add up to 7144 GB of storage. They are also susceptible to weather conditions and can become contaminated with viruses.

• "*Piratebox*" *(David Darts)*

Piratebox[27] is based on the same concept: an anonymous device for storing information with an open WiFi network to which anyone can connect by opening a web browser, which redirects them to a page where they can upload their files and open and download previously uploaded files. This "micro-Internet" is disconnected from the main Internet and doesn't log any information, ensuring confidentiality. The area covered by the system depends on the site and the

[24] http://www.battlemesh.org/
[25] https://github.com/servalproject/batphone
[26] http://deaddrops.com/dead-drops/db-map/
[27] http://daviddarts.com/piratebox/?id=PirateBox

quality of antenna used. It can be installed on a low-cost Wi-Fi router or on the microcomputer Raspberry Pi by adding a WiFi key, or on a traditional computer or cell phone.

This project has inspired a host of others in the users' community[28]: there's "LibraryBox" for sharing books, "Micro Cloud" to have ready access to one's documents, "OpenStreetMap Box" to access a free offline map service, T.A.Z. Box, PédagoBox, KoKoBox, the list goes on…

Conclusion

With global issues on one side and local inequalities on the other, it is perhaps a good idea to bear the founding principles of the Internet in mind, namely "distributing intelligence". Rather than technical and political centralisation, we should give priority to the open sharing of knowledge and technical devices, and, together, protect the idea of the Internet as a commons that we can all freely access. We will then be able to imagine a future where anyone can go and get the Internet from their local artisan network, and which will be as varied and tasty as the vegetables grown with love by a passionate market gardener. The Internet should not be a black box that a privileged few gradually close the lid on, but it should be seen as a technology that is ours to adapt and govern, and whose diversity we all need to nurture so that it in turn nourishes us.

[28] http://wiki.labomedia.org

Net Neutrality. The Internet as a Commons[1]

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The principle of Net neutrality has been the subject of many heated debates over the last few years, especially in the United States and in Europe. These debates are interesting to analyse as they illustrate how the Internet is upheld as a commons. The debates also show how there are attempts to control the Internet, in the name of commercial interests or what in commons theory are called "enclosures"[2].

The principle of Net neutrality was popularised by Tim Wu in 2003 with his article "Network Neutrality, Broadcast Discrimination" (Wu, 2003). The article highlighted how important it is for a regulator to establish principles preventing discrimination on telecommunication networks, especially on the Internet. Although the concept is relatively new, it is also one of the founding principles of the Internet. On the one hand, the Internet's architecture is built on the principle of an end-to-end system which specifies that the network's intelligence is located in the ends – the computers and servers, while its heart, consisting of routers, is "dumb" and serves only to carry data without consideration of its content, its source or its destination. On the other hand, the principle of neutrality is derived from the older principle of "common carrier" which refers to a person, a company or a network of transport or telecommunication that "carries" goods or people, without discriminating among them, in the goal of public interest. Airline, train and taxi companies are examples of common carriers as they cannot arbitrarily discriminate against their passengers (goods or people). The idea of a common carrier thus opposes that of a private carrier, which can refuse transport for discretional reasons.

[1] This article is based on a previous article by the author (Couture, 2009) and on French and English Wikipedia pages on Net neutrality: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Net_neutrality.

[2] In commons theory, the term enclosure refers to owners' acquisition or "enclosure" of spaces or goods previously intended for collective or common use.

If up until now, neutrality has been respected in how the Internet operates, recent developments are casting doubt on this, hence the need for adequate legislation. Certain telecommunication operators are currently seeking to prioritise certain forms of communication on the Internet, subject to its content, source or destination. Several examples of violations against Net neutrality:

- The most obvious violation of Net neutrality is censorship programmes. Countries, such as China or Cuba, that block access to certain Internet sites. Another example is Turkey, which recently blocked Twitter. In Canada, in 2005, the operator Telus prevented its clients from accessing a union's site at the time of a labour dispute (OpenNet Initiative, 2005).
- Differentiated services offering restricted access to Internet sites or services. This trend is more prevalent regarding Internet access via a cell phone. In 2010 in France, the virtual operator M6 Mobile advertised a deal of €1 a month for access uniquely to social network sites Facebook and Twitter. Again in France, Orange advertised the same year, unlimited access to the music streaming service Deezer but limited access to other Internet services. Other telephone operators also block access to IP telephony provider Skype.

For or against Net neutrality

There are two main arguments for Net neutrality. First and foremost, democracy. For its advocates, the principal of neutrality means the Internet can remain open and free, in the name of democracy and freedom of expression. Several activists maintain that with the Internet, as it is now, accessible alternative media can be developed at a relatively low price whereas with a non-neutral Internet, controlled by telecommunication operators, these media could become less accessible. The latter argument highlights that neutrality fosters innovation by giving small-time players the opportunity to develop services accessible to everyone. More specifically, by keeping the Net neutral, its end-to-end architecture can also be preserved.

The main argument against Net neutrality is that neutrality cannot guarantee quality of service, particularly during periods when real-time communication services are congested. It is actually very difficult for an operator to offer upscale services on a 'neutral' Internet because they cannot legally prioritise certain content over others in order to ensure this quality. The majority of those involved in the debate, irrespective of whether they are for or against, agree on the fact that if the Internet is to remain "neutral", operators can only ensure best-effort delivery. Another argument against is that telecommunication operators want to get a return on their investments in telecommunication infrastructures. Thus telecommunication operators (France Télécom, Verizon, AT&T, Bell) have positioned themselves against Net neutrality while application providers (YouTube, Google, Facebook) wish to preserve it.

We should mention, however, that among the supporters of Net neutrality, several raise the issue of its limits. Tim Wu, who popularised the Net neutral-



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July 2014. rally for Net neutrality by President Obama's Procession route.

ity concept, acknowledges that the Internet in its current form, which doesn't guarantee transmission quality, tends to slow down communication applications in real time, prioritising asynchronous forms like email and file transfers. Other supporters of Net neutrality are pushing for legislative measures against spam, denial-of-service attacks and congestion problems. Here again, Net neutrality is primarily about preventing arbitrary discrimination.

It should also be noted that most of its supporters recognize the need for some kind of control over data, in order to deal with security attacks or periods of severe congestion. The question becomes more problematic, however, regarding the issue of prioritising certain types of content to meet the demands of governments and cultural industries. One of the fundamental questions, then, is knowing which reasonable network management practices should be used which respect the principle of neutrality.

Political recognition of neutrality

It remains unclear to what extent the importance of Net neutrality has been recognised from a legislative and political point of view. In the United States, where the debate began, the Net neutrality movement emerged alongside the Save The Internet coalition. For the first decade of 2000, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) – the American agency that regulates telecommunications – adopted various stances that were positive for Net neutrality, including a ban on telecommunication operators blocking access to sites like Netflix or services like



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February 2012. Protest for a free Internet outside the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

BitTorrent and Skype. Yet these decisions were legally revoked on several occasions under the pretext that telecommunication operators were not, according to the law, considered "common carriers". In April 2014, the FCC proposed new laws that would allow certain Internet users to access faster lanes of telecommunication. This announcement led some to conclude that this represented the end of Net neutrality[3].

In Europe, there has also been extensive debate around the issue of Net neutrality. In 2010, the Telecoms Package, a collection of directives for the telecommunications sector, integrated a political declaration conducive to Net neutrality. This declaration, however, had no legal bearing, resulting in much disillusionment from several NGOs representing the principle of neutrality. In April 2014, the European parliament adopted a bill seeking to integrate Net neutrality and prevent service providers and telecommunication operators from discriminating against content. However, the bill still needs to be approved by the Council of the European Union before coming into force.

It's clear that the question of Net neutrality is the subject of many a debate and is still a long way off being resolved.

Net neutrality: should the network be regulated like a commons?

The debate over Net neutrality underlines the way in which the Internet represents a commons, jeopardised by new enclosures. This perspective is clearly formulated

[3] See www.savetheinternet.com

by David Bollier, an author who has written several books on the commons. For Bollier, the principle of neutrality is a fundamental, reason why the Internet has been so generative: "Because the Internet functions as a commons, it enables anyone to find others, strike up a collaboration and generate useful stuff without first having to pay a premium fee, raise capital or persuade a corporate gatekeeper that the idea is marketable"[4]. We can thus analyse the debate on Net neutrality as a controversy between those who see the Internet as a commons and those who have a more mercantile vision of web infrastructures. It should also be pointed out that certain supporters of Net neutrality, especially service providers like Facebook and Twitter, obviously have invested commercial interest in Internet-based telecommunication networks retaining the status of a commons.

Lastly, we should mention the work of Sascha Meinrath and Victor Pickard (2008) who, while supporting Net neutrality, insist on the need to pursue other avenues in the quest to democratise the Internet, such as the free software and free culture movements, and by advocating open standards. Another example is the global movement that emerged at the World Summit on the Information Society, which is pushing for the Internet to be governed by a multilateral body. It's true that a truly democratic Internet would require rethinking all its aspects: its governance, its ownership, its operation, its different uses, its claim to universality (an Internet for everyone), etc. The two authors thus put forward the idea of expanding the principle of network neutrality so that all aspects of the Internet are thrown into the democratic debate. This "new network neutrality" would be based on several principles including neutrality vis-à-vis the economic model and user-driven control, i.e., at least be governed by an international body and not just the United Sates.

Other than going over the technical issues and limits related to Net neutrality, this debate highlights the idea of preserving the Internet as a commons instead of through new enclosures which currently take the shape of companies seeking to control Internet content and use with filtering systems and discriminatory pricing. The debate on Net neutrality also reveals the emergence of a collective approach to political issues related to the Internet and digital technologies.

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[4] Article published October 13 2009 on www.forbes.com

Advocacy for a Legal Protection of Online Freedom of Expression

MARIE DUPONCHELLE

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SIMON DESCARPENTRIES

Member of the board of directors of the French Data Network (FDN), s a French non-profit organisation (*association loi 1901*) which aims to promote the use and development of Internet and Usenet networks. FDN provides a number of services to its members, employing a participative, members-managed process.

Facebook blocking an account after one of its users posted "The Origin of the World", the famous painting by Gustave Courbet, due to sexual content, or Youtube deleting a Greenpeace video excoriating the commercial partnership between Lego and Shell: these are just some of the examples of technical providers removing material, violating the right to freedom of expression. What are the legal answers to such actions, which amount to Internet censorship? One solution would be the creation of a new type of legal infringement, targeting obstruction to freedom of expression by so-called "providers of communications services to the online public".

"The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law."[1] With these few words, the authors of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and

[1] Art. 11, of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.

of the Citizen laid the foundations of one of the most important freedoms in democratic societies: freedom of expression.

Since then, other important texts such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights[2] and the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms[3] have also enshrined freedom of expression. Freedom of expression can be defined as the ability to freely share one's thoughts, whatever the means or the media. Under the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, freedom of opinion – being able to form one's own view on any matter – is a component of freedom of expression[4]. It also goes hand in hand with press freedom, even if this latter freedom includes the more specific issue of state-governed media control.

Legal characterisation of freedom of expression.

As its name suggests, freedom of expression is a freedom[5] and not an individual right, in the sense of a "legally protected interest"[6]. Is there a difference between a right and a freedom? The answer is yes. The power of a freedom is that it is distributed on an equal basis to all people, whereas the benefit of a right may be restricted to some individuals, to the exclusion of others. Therefore, it can be argued that every individual equally enjoys the freedom to express themselves. More specifically, freedom of expression is also a "fundamental freedom", which can be broadly defined as an essential freedom of the individual, inseparable from the rule of law and democracy. Freedom of expression thus has a specific legal status based on this legal characterisation.

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[2] Art. 19, Universal Declaration on Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

[3] Art. 10, of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms:
"1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.
2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary."

[4] For some authors, however, freedom of expression is a component of freedom of opinion. "*liberté pour tout individu de penser ce qu'il veut (liberté de pensée) et d'exprimer sa pensée (liberté d'expression)*". ["Freedom of opinion: Freedom for any individual to think what he/she wishes (freedom of thought) and to express one's thoughts (freedom of expression)". Cornu G. et alii (2000). *Vocabulaire juridique*, 8th ed., PUF.

[5] "*exercice sans entrave garanti par le Droit de telle faculté ou activité* (…)". ["unimpeded exercise, guaranteed by law, of any given ability or activity…". (Cornu G. et alii)

[6] Von Ihering R. (1888). *L'esprit du droit romain*, transl. O. de Meulenaere, 3rd ed., IV, 1888, § 70, pp. 327–28.

Legal status of freedom of expression.

Article 11 of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen would not have had much effect without the momentous support of public authorities. Indeed, the authors of the French Constitution of the 5th Republic, adopted on October 4th 1958, gave it constitutional status by specifically referring to this groundbreaking declaration in the Preamble.

So the inclusion of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in the "constitutionally protected core" has given freedom of expression the highest legal protection possible: constitutional status.

Constitutional status is not only a matter of prestige or embellishment. It has real legal significance, particularly when it comes to protecting freedom of expression against violations by legislative or executive powers. In France, when there is a legislative violation of freedom of expression, it is referred to the Constitutional Council (*Conseil constitutionnel*), either beforehand or afterwards, with the procedure known as "*Question prioritaire de constitutionalité*" (QPC), which may be translated as "an application for a preliminary ruling on the conformity of a legislative provision with the Constitution". Executive orders and regulations are referred to administrative courts.

Addressing violations of freedom of expression.

Natural or legal persons may also commit violations against freedom of expression. That is why impeding freedom of expression is classified as an offence under Article 431-1 of the French Penal Code: "Concerted obstruction, with the use of threats, to the exercise of the freedom of expression, labour, association, assembly or demonstration is punished by one year's imprisonment and a fine of €15,000. Concerted obstruction to the exercise of one of the freedoms referred to under the previous paragraph with the use of blows, acts of violence, or acts of destruction or damage within the meaning of the present Code is punished by three years' imprisonment and a fine of €45,000". This article targets attacks on freedom of expression that involve "concerted obstruction with the use of threats" or "concerted obstruction, with the use of blows, acts of violence, or acts of destruction or damage".

Abusing freedom of expression.

Freedom of expression still has limits. You cannot say everything, nor advocate anything. It is a well-known principle: a person's freedom ends where other people's freedom begins[7]. The legal term for this sort of illegitimate exercise of freedom is "abuse". Article 11 of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and

[7] See Article 4 of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen : "Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law".

of the Citizen does include logically such a limitation on the exercise of freedom of expression in case of abuse.

Abusing freedom of expression can take many forms, some of which are listed in the 1881 French law on press freedom[8]. Insult, libel, threats or contempt of a person charged with a public service mission are just a few examples of abuses of freedom of expression, characterised as offences by law. The development of electronic communication does not change the nature of these characterisations.

Freedom of expression and electronic communication.

Being a fundamental constitutional freedom, freedom of expression also applies, of course, to electronic communication. According to the French Constitutional Council[9], freedom of expression should imply access to communication services targeted at the online public.

Nevertheless, the French legislature was careful to reassert these principles indirectly, by way of Article 1, Paragraph 1 of the law on freedom of communication (also known as "*Loi Léotard*")[10], which reads as follows: "Communication to the public by electronic means is free".

Paragraph 2 of the same article immediately introduces limitations on this freedom: "The exercise of this freedom may be limited only to the extent required, on the one hand, with regards to respect for the dignity of the human being, of other people's freedom and property, the pluralistic expression of thought and opinion, and, on the other hand, to the protection of children and adolescents, the safeguard of public order, purposes of national defence, public service requirements, the inherent technical constraints of communication channels, as well as to the need for audiovisual services to develop their audiovisual production". What are then the punishments for violations of freedom of expression by electronic means?

The legal vacuum regarding the punishment of violations of freedom of expression by online communication service providers.

The only existing penalty specific to electronic communication is to be found in the 2004 "Law on Confidence in the Digital Economy" (*loi pour la confiance dans*

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[8] French Law on press freedom, passed on 29 July 1881.

[9] Cons. Const Decision No. 2009- 580 DC, June 10, 2009, on the law promoting the distribution and protection of creative works on the Internet: "12. Whereas under Article 11 of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen: 'The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law.'; In the media sector's present state and given the widespread development of online communication services, as well as the growing importance of these services for democratic participation and the expression of ideas and opinions, this right includes freedom to access these services".

[10] French Law No. 86-1067, on freedom of communication, passed on 30 September 1986.

l'économie numérique, LCEN)[11]. Article 6, Paragraph 4 of this law characterises a legal offence punishable by a sentence of one year imprisonment and a fine of 15 000 EUR: "describing content or activity as illegal" to a natural or legal person which provides communication services to the online public "in order to remove or stop the dissemination of this content or activity, while being aware that the description is inaccurate"[12]. This provision could apply to safeguarding freedom of expression. In other words, someone who would describe online content as illegal, being aware that this is not true, and demand a social network or a video sharing service to remove it, would be in fact violating the exercise of a person's freedom of expression, and could be prosecuted under criminal law. So there are criminal penalties for violations of freedom of expression consisting of threats, violence or false claims to online communication services, but there are no penalties for providers of these services removing content on their own accord.

Under the provisions of Article 6 of LCEN, however, online communication services are obliged to delete any data they store, as soon as they become aware of its illegality[13], but are under no obligation to monitor the content they store[14]. Consequently, service providers can choose to remove content that they deem illegal even though what they would characterise as caution turns into a genuine violation of freedom of expression, such as the renowned blocking of a Facebook account after a user posted an image of the Gustave Courbet painting "The Origin of the World". One can also mention the case of Apple, which has censored Naomi Wolf's book, *Vagina*, on its download platforms and the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, which in 2010 dropped developing an application for iPad due to the ban imposed by Apple on any sexual reference.

The need for legislative changes.

The risk of such behaviour is, to put it simply, a new strain of "Internet censorship". Indeed, these providers implicitly claim a right to remove any online content, despite the fact that it represents a violation of freedom of expression

[11] French Law No. 2004-575 on Confidence in the Digital Economy, passed on of 21 June 2004. French Official Gazette No. 0143 of 22 June 2004.

[12] Art. 1, IV, LCEN: "Communication to the online public includes any form of transmission, requested by an individual, of digital data that is not private correspondence, by way of electronic communication, allowing a mutual exchange of information between transmitter and receiver.

[13] Art. 6, LCEN: "2. Natural or legal persons who store signals, writing, images, sounds or messages of any kind provided by users, even free of charge, in order to make them available to the public through communication services to the online public can not be held liable before a civil court for the activities or information stored at the request of a user of these services if they did not have actual knowledge of their unlawful character, or of facts or circumstances indicating unlawfulness, or if, by the time they gained this knowledge, they acted promptly to remove the data or make it inaccessible (...). 3 Persons referred to in 2. can be held liable before a criminal court in respect of information stored at the request of a recipient of these services if they did not have actual knowledge of the unlawful activity or information, or if, as soon as they were aware of it, they acted promptly to remove this information or make it inaccessible."

[14] Art. 6 LCEN: "7. The persons referred to in 1. and 2. are not subject to a general obligation to monitor the information which they transmit or store, nor a general obligation to actively research for facts or circumstances indicating illegal activity."

– and this without any form of accountability, since there is no penalty, to date, for this type of violation.

Accordingly, in order to protect freedom of expression in an increasingly "ever-connected" society, there needs to be legislative changes, with corresponding penalties, which target illegitimate actions by online communication services providers. Concrete proposals have been put forward[15]. There is also the need, in France, to amend either Article 6 of LCEN or Article 431-1 of the Criminal Code, in order to legally formalise this notion of a violation of freedom of expression by a communication service provider. This offence could be defined as follows: that any person or organisation providing a communication service to the online public impedes, by any means, the exercise of freedom of expression in the use of this service.

[15] See for eemple thatof the #Numnow collective

Free Software: the Way Forward for Digital Commons

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To quote Wikipedia (November 19 2013), "free software is computer software that gives users the legal and technical freedom to run any software for any purpose as well as to study, modify and distribute the original software and adapted versions". Free software is not only interesting to analyse in itself, but also how it has served as an inspiration for other initiatives. Yet although the development of some free software remains strongly focussed on a "community" approach, others are heavily invested in commercial interests, like IBM, Sun and Google. In this respect, free software appears like a paradigmatic case of digital commons, as they accentuate tensions around how commons are governed.

A brief history of free software

The principles of free software were established in the eighties, and central to these was access to the source code. The source code is basically the formula for how a program or a software operates. More specifically, it is a group of instructions written in human-readable computer language, specifying the actions of a software. The idea behind free software is not that it is free, but that access to its source code is free. The Free Software Foundation defines free software according to four essential freedoms[1]:

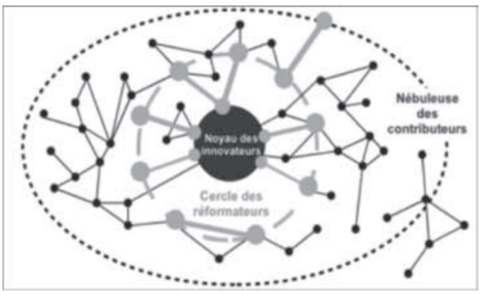
- The freedom to run the program as you wish, for any purpose (freedom 0).
- The freedom to study how the program works, and change it so it does your computing as you wish (freedom 1). Access to the source code is a precondition for this.

[1] www.gnu.org

- The freedom to redistribute copies so you can help your neighbor (freedom 2).
- The freedom to distribute copies of your modified versions to others (freedom 3). By doing this you can give the whole community a chance to benefit from your changes. Access to the source code is a precondition for this.

At the outset, the principles of free software were primarily based on an ethical purpose. It was not so much about making high-performance, user-friendly software but about ensuring knowledge could be shared (the software's source code) with one's peers. Over the years, free software grew more and more popular, to the extent that by the turn of the millennium, the model had attracted the attention of companies who primarily saw in it the lucrative potential of developing durable and efficient software. This is when the term "open source" emerged, a term which was more attractive for companies than "free software", often understood as being "free of charge". There is still tension around this term, to the extent that Richard Stallman, the founder of the free software movement, believes that there are two opposed political camps within the same community.

Contrary to what the initial observers of free software believed, it is far from operating without rules. The way in which free software is produced can be described as "innovation by usage" or "bottom-up innovation". According to the sociologistDominique Cardon, there are three circles to bottom-up innovation: the circle of "innovators" who create, the nebula of "contributors", who make some kind of contribution to the project, and an intermediary circle – the circle of "reformers", which includes people who improve and strengthen these contributions.



Source: Cardon, Dominique. 2005. "Innovation par l'usage". *In Enjeux de mots : regards multiculturels sur les sociétés de l'information*, coordinated by Alain Ambrosi, Valérie Peugeot and Daniel Pimienta. Caen (France), C & F Éditions.

Although there is a whole host of individual free software projects which are relatively inactive, the majority of developed, collective projects can be described using this model of bottom-up innovation. There are, however, important differences in regards to governance and how they are developed. I will sidetrack here to look at two free software projects which are today emblematic: the software *Linux*, and the operating system *Debian*.

The Linux kernel

Linux is undoubtedly one of the most renowned free software solutions to such an extent that it is often represented as the emblem for free software. But people often mistake Linux for a complete and autonomous computer system (like Windows) whereas it is actually just an operating system kernel. This is why



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Debian Project

many free software activists often use the term GNU/Linux instead of just Linux. Although Linux is still not used very much in a desktop context, it is used extensively for certain functions, like that of *Android* phones, which represents the biggest market share of Smartphones.

Linux was created in 1991 by Linus Torvalds, then an IT student. Torvalds' objective at the time was not so much to contribute to the commons as to start a project "just for fun". Yet it triggered the sudden interest of a number of computer engineers – a success which led to Eric Raymond, one of the creators of the term "open source", to later compare the Linux model to that of a bazaar where the coordinator (Linus Torvalds) assembles different items and makes them into a coherent whole[2]. This description is sometimes considered to be the first sociological analysis of the free software model.

Linux's development is generally seen as being fiercely driven by its founder Linus Torvalds, as well as being heavily influenced by companies. Torvalds is often referred to as the community's "benevolent dictator". He works with a small team and several hundred contributors who suggest minor changes to the project. This set-up more or less reflects the bottom-up model described above. More precisely, Linux's governance and development model is based on the production cycle of new versions. So the project leader (and benevolent dictator) is responsible for producing, approximately every three months, a new version

[2] Raymond, Eric Steven (2002). "The Cathedral and the Bazaar". Sevastopol: O'relly Media. On line: www.catb.org

called the "vanilla" branch which integrates new functions. Other versions called "stable" versions are maintained by the "stable team". A "development" version is also available and new modifications are integrated every day.

It should also be mentioned that commercial companies play a big role in developing Linux by providing financial backing and by employing programmers who oversee certain functions. The Linux Foundation includes corporate members like IBM, Intel, Samsung and Google. It fosters Linux's growth by supplying the infrastructures needed for its development and by providing support to individuals and companies using Linux. Corporate participation means the software is developed in a way that serves their own interests and objectives. This has sowed the seeds of doubt in the minds of certain free software advocates who see this as representing a new tactic to privatise commons[3].

The Debian Project

Debian is what is called a "distribution", that is, an operating system and a set of software utilities based on the Linux kernel. Although it is not currently very popular, Debian distribution is noteworthy because it is the source of other distributions, such as Ubuntu, which is much more popular and often used by novices. It can be interesting to compare Debian to Linux because the two projects have quite different ways of functioning and Debian is much more community-focussed than Linux. Debian stands out also for its social contract, constitution and policy, all of which form the pillars of the project's governance.

The social contract is in a way the community's founding document. It defines the community's moral and inalienable principles, gives its own definition of free software and stipulates that all its components will remain free. The contract also emphasizes its commitment to transparency, in regards to the community's memory, by for example keeping records of past debates and bugs.

The constitution[4] defines decision-making bodies, conflict resolution and powers held by its members. It states that the project leader is elected after a period of six weeks. It also stipulates that it is possible to override a decision made by the project leader if a certain number of developers request it[5]. The constitution itself can be amended with a 3:1 majority. In regards to Debian's policy, it stipulates the technical rules for incorporating a "package" (software or software component) into Debian distribution. The policy also specifies that all software included in

[3] See for example the very popular article about Google's iron grip on Android – a Debian by-product – and the way in which the system is developed so that it is basically doesn't work without several proprietary components integrated into it: 'Google iron grip on Android: Controllin open source by any means necessary' http://artstechnien.com

[4] www.debian.org/devel/constitution

[5] In a distinctively 'geeky' style, the project specifies that the number of developers needed to override a decision must be 2K, where K is Q or 5, whichever is smaller, and Q is half of the square root of the number of current developers.

Debian must be free (according to the Debian Free Software Guidelines) and stipulates certain rules for choosing the package name and version. The policy is much more flexible than the constitution and is regularly updated. This is how the administration handbook describes the policy's editorial process:

"Anyone can propose an amendment to the Debian Policy just by submitting a bug report with a severity level of 'wishlist' against the Debian-policy package. The process that then starts is documented in /usr/share/doc/debian-policy/Process.html: if it is acknowledged that the problem revealed must be resolved by creating a new rule in the Debian Policy, discussion begins on the debian-policy@lists.debian.org mailing list until consensus is reached and a proposal issued. Someone then drafts the desired amendment and submits it for approval (in the form of a patch to review). As soon as two other developers approve the fact that the proposed amendment reflects the consensus reached in the previous discussion (they 'second' it), the proposal can be included in the official document by one of the Debian-policy package maintainers. If the process fails at one of these steps, the maintainers close the bug, classifying the proposal as rejected."[6] It's also interesting to note the subproject *Debian-Women*, which aims to encourage women's involvement in the project. This illustrates both the project's political grounding and the desire to ensure plurality in those participating.

Free software as a commons?

It's clear that free software, in its concrete form, meets the criteria of what constitutes a commons, namely it is neither a private good nor a public good. Yet it is interesting to note the different ways in which projects are governed, whether they be more authoritarian (or even "dictatorial") as in Linux's case, or more democratic, as in the instance of Debian.

It's also important to point out that in the world of free software, the features of a commons, a public good and a private good are closely related. As we have illustrated, Linux may be a commons, but it receives substantial financial backing from major corporations which is put into producing private or semi-private goods such as the Google ecosystem. Likewise, although Debian represents more distinctively a "commons", it is also used by Ubuntu distribution, which is developed and financed by a commercial venture, Canonical. These connections are not just one-sided, though, as private companies also contribute to the commons, even if this contribution represents an invested interest and sparks concern among the supporters of free software. Furthermore, this ambiguous relationship between the commons and the public good is highlighted by state administration's increasing interest in free software. In the free software debate, we can see that the relation between a commons, a public good and a private good is a complex one, but there is no doubt that for now free software retains the distinct quality of a commons.

[6] For an excellent overview of how the Debian community operates see: http://debian-handbook.info/

Why Free Software Is More Important Now Than Ever Before

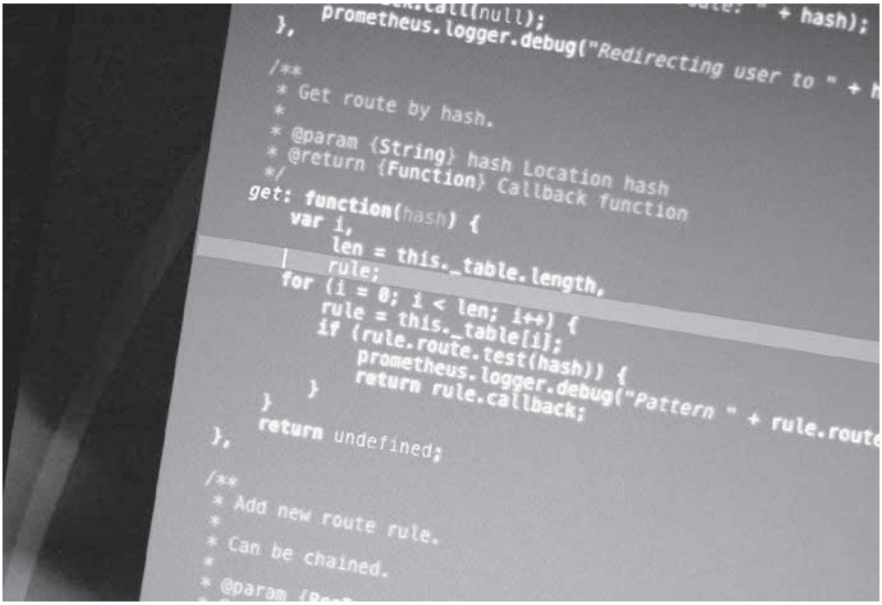
RICHARD STALLMAN
North American activist and developer of free software. He advocates software distribution that allows the user not only to freely access software, but also to study, distribute and change it. Software that provides these freedoms (on paper) is 'free software.' He is best known for launching the GNU Project and founding the Free Software Foundation. Richard Stallman also developed the GNU compiler collection and GNU Emacs, and he wrote the GNU General Public License.

A different version of this article first appaream in WIRED.

It is now 30 years since I launched the campaign for freedom in computing, that is, for software to be free or "libre" (this word is used to emphasize that we're talking about freedom, not price). Some proprietary programs, such as Photoshop, are very expensive; others, such as Flash Player, are available gratis – either way, they subject their users to someone else's power.

Much has changed since the beginning of the free software movement: Most people in advanced countries now own computers – sometimes called "phones" – and use the Internet with them. Non-free software still makes the users surrender control over their computing to someone else, but now there is another way to lose it: Service as a Software Substitute, or SaaSS, which means letting someone else's server do your own computing activities.

Both non-free software and SaaSS can spy on the user, shackle the user, and even attack the user. Malware is common in services and proprietary software products because the users don't have control over them. That's the fundamental



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issue: while non-free software and SaaSS are controlled by some other entity (typically a corporation or a state), *free software is controlled by its users*.

Why does this control matter? Because freedom means having control over your own life. If you use a program to carry out activities in your life, your freedom depends on your having control over the program. You deserve to have control over the programs you use, and all the more so when you use them for something important in your life.

Your control over the program requires four essential freedoms. If any of them is missing or inadequate, the program is proprietary (or "non-free"):

- (0) The freedom to run the program as you wish, for whatever purpose.
- (1) The freedom to study the program's "source code", and change it, so the program does your computing as you wish. Programs are written by programmers in a programming language – like English combined with algebra – and that form of the program is the "source code". Anyone who knows programming, and has the program in source code form, can read the source code, understand its functioning, and change it too. When all you get is the executable form, a series of numbers that are efficient for the computer to run but extremely hard for a human being to understand, understanding and changing the program in that form are forbiddingly hard.
- (2) The freedom to make and distribute exact copies when you wish. (It is not an obligation; doing this is your choice. If the program is free, that doesn't mean someone has an obligation to offer you a copy, or that you have an obligation to offer him a copy. Distributing a program to users without freedom

mistreats them; however, choosing not to distribute the program – using it privately – does not mistreat anyone.)

- (3) The freedom to make and distribute copies of your modified versions, when you wish.

The first two freedoms mean each user has individual control over the program. With the other two freedoms, any group of users can together exercise *collective control* over the program. The result is that the users control the program. If the users don't control the program, the program controls the users.

With proprietary software, there is always some entity, the "owner" of the program, that controls the program – and through it, exercises power over its users. A non-free program is a yoke, an instrument of unjust power. In extreme cases (though this extreme has become widespread) proprietary programs are designed to spy on the users, restrict them, censor them, and abuse them. For instance, the operating system of Apple iThings does all of these. Windows, mobile phone firmware, and Google Chrome for Windows include a universal backdoor that allows some company to change the program remotely without asking permission. The Amazon Kindle has a back door that can erase books.
Freedom means having control over your own life.

With the goal of ending the injustice of non-free software, the free software movement develops free programs so users can free themselves. We began in 1984 by developing the free operating system GNU. Today, millions of computers run GNU, mainly in the GNU/Linux combination.

Where does SaaSS fit in all this? Service as a Software Substitute doesn't mean the programs on the server are non-free (though they often are). Rather, using SaaSS causes the same injustices as using a non-free program: they are two paths to the same bad place. Take the example of a SaaSS translation service: The user sends text to the server, and the server translates it (from English to Spanish, say) and sends the translation back to the user. Now the job of translating is under the control of the server operator rather than the user.

If you use SaaSS, the server operator controls your computing. It requires entrusting all the pertinent data to the server operator, which will be forced to show it to the state as well – who does that server really serve, after all?

If the users don't control the program, the program controls the users.

When you use proprietary programs or SaaSS, first of all you do wrong to yourself, because it gives some entity unjust power over you. For your own sake, you should escape. It also wrongs others if you make a promise not to share. It

is evil to keep such a promise, and a lesser evil to break it; to be truly upright, you should not make the promise at all.

There are cases where using non-free software puts pressure directly on others to do likewise. Skype is a clear example: when one person uses the non-free Skype client software, it requires another person to use that software too – thus surrendering their freedoms along with yours. (Google Hangouts have the same problem.) We should refuse to use such programs even briefly, even on someone else's computer.

Another harm of using non-free programs and SaaSS is that it rewards the perpetrator, encouraging further development of that program or "service", leading in turn to even more people falling under the developing company's thumb. The indirect harm is magnified when the user is a public entity or a school. Public agencies exist for the people – not for themselves. When they do computing, they do it for the people. They have a duty to maintain full control over that computing on the people's behalf. Therefore, they must use only free software and reject SaaSS.

The country's computational sovereignty also requires this. According to *Bloomberg*, Microsoft shows Windows bugs to the NSA before fixing them. We do not know whether Apple does likewise, but it is under the same U.S. government pressure as Microsoft. For a government to use such software endangers national security.

Schools – and all educational activities – influence the future of society through what they teach. So schools should teach *exclusively* free software, to transmit democratic values and the habit of helping other people. (Not to mention it helps a future generation of programmers master the craft.) To teach use of a non-free program is to implant dependence on its owner, which contradicts the social mission of the school.

Proprietary developers would have us punish students who are good enough at heart to share software or curious enough to want to change it. They are even drawing up anti-sharing propaganda for schools. Instead, each class should have this rule: "Students, this class is a place where we share our knowledge. If you bring software to class, you may not keep it for yourself. Rather, you must share copies with the rest of the class – including the program's source code, in case someone else wants to learn. Therefore, bringing proprietary software to class is not permitted, unless it is for reverse engineering practice."

In computing, cooperation includes redistributing exact copies of a program to other users. It also includes distributing your changed versions to them. Free software encourages these forms of cooperation, while proprietary software



© David J Morgan

forbids them. It forbids redistribution of copies, and by denying users the source code, it blocks them from making changes. SaaSS has the same effects: If your computing is done over the web in someone else's server, by someone else's copy of a program – you can't see it or touch the software that does your computing, so you can't redistribute it or change it.

Other kinds of works are also used for practical activities, including recipes for cooking, educational works such as textbooks, reference works such as dictionaries and encyclopedias, fonts for displaying paragraphs of text, circuit diagrams for hardware for people to build, and patterns for making useful (not merely decorative) objects with a 3-D printer. Since these are not software, the free software movement strictly speaking doesn't cover them; but the same reasoning applies and leads to the same conclusion: These works should carry the four freedoms.

I'm often asked to describe the "advantages" of free software. But the word "advantages" is too weak when it comes to freedom.

Life without freedom is oppression, and that applies to computing as well as every other activity in our lives.

We must win control of all the software we use. How can we win this control? By rejecting SaaSS, and non-free software on the computers we own or regularly use. By developing free software (for those of us who are programmers). By refusing to develop or promote non-free software or SaaSS. By spreading these ideas to others. Let's make all computer users free.

02

CITIZEN MOBILISATIONS: MEDIA VOUCHING FOR THE RIGHT TO COMMUNICATION

In France, while the mainstream press is either becoming increasingly dependent on advertising or is controlled by major financial investors and industrial groups, especially defence corporations (Dassault, Lagardère), the rise of the Internet has fostered the emergence of new independent media. News websites like Mediapart, Arrêt sur Images, Almerondes, Bastamag, and a number of local media sites approach current affairs from a fresh angle, with a different style of investigation, and represent a more independent, less appeasing form of journalism. This is a global phenomenon: whether in Tunisia, in the Amazon, on Wall Street or in the slums of Africa or Latin America, free media and open Internet is thriving in all walks of life, giving voices to social movements, communities and citizens which up until now had been previously marginalized if not totally ignored by the mainstream press. Networking between these "different" media is a way of creating connections, in the manner of the World Forum on Free Media, which cultivates exchanging and sharing practices. Part II gives an overview of these emerging alternatives and mobilisations.

World Forum of Free Media: a Space to Generate New Forms of Collective Activism

ERIKA CAMPELO
Project manager and coordinator of international partnerships at Ritimo. She represents the network within the World Forum of Free Media and co-facilitates the collaborative digital exchange platform E-change.

RITA FREIRE
Journalist and representative of International Ciranda of Shared Communication within the World Social Forum International Council. She is also Vice-President of the Brazil Communication Company (EBC) and a facilitator at the World Forum of Free Media (WFFM).

The World Forum of Free Media is an initiative that emerged alongside the World Social Forum, where activists fighting for freedom of expression and a new form of communication came together in their common goal. These activists have been involved in the independent media's countless experiences and struggles.

The First World Forum of Free Media (WFFM) took place in 2009 at the WSF in Belém, under the slogan "*Take action to communicate, Communicate to take action*". In 2011, at the WSF in Dakar, a movement assembly was held advocating the right to communication. The Second WFFM took place in 2012 alongside the Rio+20 People's Summit, and approved the movement's recommendations, which included defending rules which support democratic media and highlighting the pivotal role of free, open technology and technological appropriation. The Third WFFM, held in Tunis in 2013, began the process of thinking over the need for a collective framework of principles and actions on which to base this approach. This resulted in the idea of establishing a World Charter of Free Media.



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WFFM.

After the experience of five regional forums (held between 2008 to 2014) and three world forums (Belém 2009, Rio de Janeiro 2012 and Tunis 2013), the World Forum of Free Media sees itself as being a space to create new forms of collective activism around information and the right to communication. It aims to become a space that supports its diverse participants to take action on an international level and transform the global system of communication.

Democratising information

In a world characterised by an abundant amount of information, yet where information that is plural, critical and varied is becoming increasingly difficult to access, the WFFM was established to explore ideas and alternatives that guarantee citizens the right to "communication by all and for all".

Democratising communication in such a way is crucial, as no democratic project can be credible or sustainable without it. The first step in this democratic project involves each and every one of us appropriating information and communication tools.

Free media, including activism via social networks, plays a fundamental role in providing the public with on-the-ground information. It reveals the limits and partiality of mainstream media discourse. A recent example is the coverage of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Free media was instrumental in deconstructing historic arguments about what constitutes "terrorism" and what "the right to defend oneself" actually means.

The different stories of attacks, often told by the victims of these attacks, seen on the pages of free media and which give a voice to those who have never had a place in the mainstream press, have resulted in the mainstream press recognising the need to change how they cover events. Yet the question is, to what extent can mainstream media, in the hands of major corporations with invested economic interests and a certain amount of political sway over governments and institutions, really shift towards a more democratic approach? The commodification of information, tools of production and the way in which it is disseminated represents a huge obstacle to democratising communication. Media and proprietary software giants all follow the

same logic based on financial profitability – and this runs counter to the idea of free circulation of knowledge and awareness.

Access to information is the starting point to finding answers to the social, economic and environmental issues that our societies are faced with, because without information, there is no action, no change, no discussion and no critical construction.

Free networks

Over the past years, progress in new information and communication technology, primarily the Internet, has opened up new ways of sharing knowledge, new possibilities for creating activist networks and organising events in different countries. Civil society has thus drawn on these new technologies to set up Internet-based radio and television stations, blogs, social networks, platforms for sharing video and audio files and e-zines and newspapers.

Communication activists are also developing free software and web interfaces as alternatives to commercial software and services. Thanks to this, the number of groups advocating alternative media and networking between groups all over of the world continues to grow.

In the alternative media landscape, there is currently not only a diverse range of people getting involved but a growing interest in teaming up with different forms of media activism (radio, TV, bloggers, journalists, etc.).

In light of this, the World Forum of Free Media is seeking to create a charter: a comprehensive document defining concepts and identifying benchmarks, with a system of implementation and adherence. The charter can also serve as a basis for specific thematic and regional-focussed documents. Its elaboration and validation process will be participative and democratic. The charter will be available online, for anyone interested to consult. Regional events have also been organised in 2014, in Brazil, Morocco, Tunisia and France. These will be opportunities to further discuss the first draft of the charter and explore regional issues. The final version will be adopted in Tunisia in 2015 at the Fourth WFFM.

The only way to provide unbiased information is to be open to many voices, each which has their own media, their own perspectives and their own networks. These voices need to able to reach the public and be protected by a law which ensures true freedom of expression – one which is genuine and comprehensive in its many and diverse forms. The World Forum of Free Media is seeking to promote this universal right to communication. It constitutes a movement encompassing all movements working towards changing and democratising societies. The World Forum of Free Media's membership and governance are grounded in media that has its origins in activist civil society.

Networking for Alter-information and Against Repression

ANDREA PLÖGER
Videoactivist, researcher and activist at Africa-Europe-Interact. Involved in the initiative 'Education No Limitation.'

With the migration of the World Social Forum to the African Continent, transnational ties of media networks are being strengthened and the idea of an interactive media network is taking shape.

In 2011, a number of West African movements and organizations took part in the Caravan for Free Movement and Fair Development to the World Social Forum in Dakar, Senegal. On the Island of Gorée, before the WSF took place, the World Charter of Migrants was launched. One of the results of the Caravan was the creation of the transnational network Afrique-Europe-Interact (AEI)[1].

The question was raised of not only how to disseminate the necessary information but also how to enable social movements to communicate with each other and with the wider public. Last year at the World Forum at Free Media, we were discussing the need to expand the network of free media and to strengthen ties with Northern and Western African media activists, so as not to leave it to journalists entrenched in interventionist armies or the ever fewer mainstream journalists in the area to inform the public about what companies, corrupt administrators and ministers and both national and international armies want the public to know – or rather what they DON'T want them to know.

Communication rights campaigns would enable free media to be more secure and more sustainable over the long run, and North African and West African

[1] AEI: www.afrique-europe-interact.net



© Acei Cheung

Cyber café.

media networks[2] are currently working to get these underway. But even in those countries where rights are assured – like Tunisia with the adoption of the new constitution – they are not being implemented without public pressure. The threat that so-called secure rights will be taken away is always a possibility, as seen in the example of Egypt.

Elsewhere, military conflicts in Libya and Mali and the ongoing conflicts in the DR Congo[3], including threats and repression of often-unidentifiable sources are an ever-present reality. And even the most basic resources to create local and free media are lacking, such as community radio, Internet cafés and public screenings.

In this article I will explore three cases from Central, Western and Northern Africa concerning activists from the Afrique–Europe-Interact network. All three cases are similar in that the mainstream media failed, for various reasons, to cover their stories. They are also alike in the fact that a lack of communication rights has prevented the development of alternative media and their long-term consolidation.

But in all three cases there has been an attempt to create an infrastructure from the grassroots level, to break isolation and get through to the public. And in all

[2] As for example those participating in the conference "Promoting and Defending Freedom of Expression in the MENA Region", held in May 2014 in Tunis, and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC: www2.amarc.org/), West Africa.
[3] These wars are also know as the 'African World War' with about six million deaths over the last 20 years.

three cases transnational ties with free media in other continents have played an important role. The idea is to strengthen these ties for the benefit of social movements in the global South and North and to facilitate the exchange of news and background information that is usually absent from the mainstream media but which is of utmost importance to activists and victims of human rights violations.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Victor Nzuzi Mbembe is a well-known journalist and land rights activist who joined the Caravan for Free Movement and Fair Development in its journey to the World Social Forum and represents AEI in the DR Congo. He is often featured on mainstream radio and television and also has his own programs on the community radio in the Mbanza Ngungu district where he works as a small-scale peasant. As an outspoken critic of landgrabbing and the corruption surrounding mega projects between the Congolese government and transnational companies, he has emerged as a defender of the local population and is being targeted by the various authorities trying to silence him: "In my country, the so-called Democratic Republic of Congo, there are a lot of radio stations, not only in the capital of Kinshasa but also in the rural areas. And there are more than 30 television channels, but they usually belong to influential politicians or the evangelical/Christian churches. The same is true for the press. Politicians and churches own most of the newspapers and there is a very close alliance between the mainstream media and political influence. If, here in Congo, you have the financial resources, you can easily appear in ten radio and TV programmes a day and have your opinion published in all the papers. What matters is how much you pay, not what the message is. The content of the media is clearly orientated in maintaining the political influence of the owner.

So there is an urgent need for alternative media which takes an analytical approach and is not governed by commercial and political interests. Technically, this can be as simple as viewing DVDs or listening to tapes of radio programs or having a caravan with live music and debates in the villages – which we have planned for the summer. This is one way of making our struggle visible throughout the world and to let people see what is happening even if they are in Germany, Belgium or France.

At an international level, I would like to mention Brazil and South Africa as emerging countries where it is hard to talk about their economic successes without mentioning their inequalities and the environmental problems. In Congo we were led to believe that Brazil is a role model in managing the rain forest and yet Brazilian companies continue to drill for oil in the Congolese rain forest, even though the damage caused by oil drillings in the Amazon are well-known. One example of international cooperation could be talking with our colleagues in Brazil so that we can get a better idea of the real situation of Brazil's rain for-

est management. That could really influence the discussion here. Similarly, the struggles of activists in Europe for the free movement of migrants and refugees, against landgrabbing, for food sovereignty and for debt relief is NOT known here. In defence of the global south's natural resources, we could also work together exchanging information on the way in which multinationals' have stripped our resources: this would mean waking up the population in the South and putting pressure on those responsible in the North.

In my case, as a victim of repression and with the threat of fifteen years of prison for influencing the public opinion, the transnational network in Germany, Belgium, France and Senegal has played an important role. With the Internet, my colleagues were able to react and help me. Yes, it really is a small world."

Niger Delta

Alassane Dicko is president of the *Association Malienne des Expulsés* (AME: www.expulsesmaliens.info) which was founded in coordination with Radio Kayira due to massive deportations of Malians from various African and European countries in the 1990s. The AME is a founding member of the transnational network *Afrique-Europe-Interact* (AEI).

In April 2014, a small group from AEI went to the Niger delta region to contact the peasants who fought fiercely for years against land grabbing in their territory (in the region of Sanamadougou and Sao). The local population – around 50,000 people – is now seriously threatened by starvation due to the theft of their land. When they went to court to protest against their land being taken away from them, police forces came into the villages and violently attacked the villagers, leading to the death and serious injuries of several people, including the mayor of Sanamadougou.

Alassane Dicko: "Information and communication is central to what peasants are fighting for. The villages concerned had no access to any information until we came with the caravan. The territory is so vast and there is no public transport, so peasants had no way of communicating with people in other villages. We needed to set up collective meetings so that everyone could understand each other's reality and to rouse a feeling of mutual solidarity. We also talked about everyone rallying together in case of emergency.

The community and rural radio stations in all twelve zones don't even attempt to address these issues, even though they are well-known problems, and some unions have started representing the peasants. But the peasants have lost all confidence in the representatives of these unions who previously supported the administration of the Niger delta region, which is itself supporting the investor. They are tired after years of accusations and threats against those who resist this colonial



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Niger Delta, April 2010. Environnementaml Rights Action activists in Nigeria look at damage caused byb oil tankers.

administration. There are many peasants who work hard for the benefit of the colonists. Since the land grabbing started, the land they have at their disposition is not enough to feed their extended families. Added to this is the deterioration of the soil due to agro-industrial use. 50,000 people in the area will either die from starvation or they will be forced into the dangerous adventure of migration."

This case also urgently needs the media's attention. And the local population needs communication tools. Often it is also a matter of distributing local information both nationally and transnationally. There is a film about the situation in the Niger delta, called *Terre Verte*. It gives a very good account of it, but due to lack of Internet access and the lack of transnational relations, the film has not yet reached the wider public. AEI is trying to make contact with the filmmaker and publish it on their website.

Cameroun

Geraud and Trésor also participated in the caravan in 2011. Years before the caravan to Dakar, they had been forced to leave their home country Cameroun due to threats against homosexuals in Cameroun and to the fact that there was a severe crack down on the student strikes in which they participated. On their way to North Africa they were held back in Mali and there joined the *Association des Réfoules d´Afrique Centrale en Mali* (ARACEM), also a founding member of AEI. During the last two years of their long migration route, which took them across more than 25 borders, they lived in the forest in miserable clandestine camps near the border fences of Ceuta and Melilla. There, they encountered all sorts of brutality and violence. They were also one of the first to hear about the killing of fifteen refugees on the 6th of February 2014

by Moroccan and Spanish police forces. Those comrades who were unable to cross the sea or get past the fences sent them pictures of the dead corpses thrown on the loading platform of a truck. They posted pictures and information on the incidents on their newly established site *Voix des Migrants* (www.voixdesmigrants.com).

Trésor said that it was the only way for refugees, hiding from the police, to contact the outer world and to tell their side of the story. The site is also a source of hope for those trapped between the sea, the bladed fences and the desert. It is a connection to a world that seeks to deny their very existence, Trésor adds. And it is a way to deal with all the cries for help which arrive daily from Morocco.

On the blog they also describe the conditions of survival for Central, West- and East African refugees in Morocco. Since the EU established the Frontex frontier regime, racism has increased sharply against Black Africans in Morocco. Geraud says that it is like an apartheid system in which they have to survive, without any basic human rights and subjected to police and racist attacks.

With the publication of various articles by activist journalists, the blog and protests outside Moroccan and Spanish Embassies in different countries, this issue has received increased media attention. The next step will be giving refugees in Morocco access to computers and mobile phones so that the wider public can learn about the human rights violations that are taking place.

In conclusion, the overall challenge that alternative media and communication activists face is strengthening the transnational network of alternative media, and fighting for their recognition – which is often their only resource and their only shield against repression. As for the concerned population, there is not only a lack of information and communication but there is also little awareness of the potential support available in the form of movements and NGOs in the global north. Alternative media and communication rights campaigns could play an important role in strengthening ties between movements in the global South and North and in supporting activist networking.

There is a need for media networks that can provide information on a regular basis - not only in times of mass protests or when there is some particularly gruesome human rights violation. In addition, alternative media should have access to the structural resources needed to carry out thorough investigative work. It is for this reason that the current campaigns for media reform and financing of alternative media in Latin America offer some hope for communication rights movements in other parts of the world. It is clear that work of the World Forum of Free Media is of utmost importance and should be extended to Central and Eastern Africa as well. An important step for the near future could also be coming up with a way – potentially again in the form of caravans – to bring media activists and movement activists to the next World Forum of Free Media in Tunis in 2015 in order to expand the network.

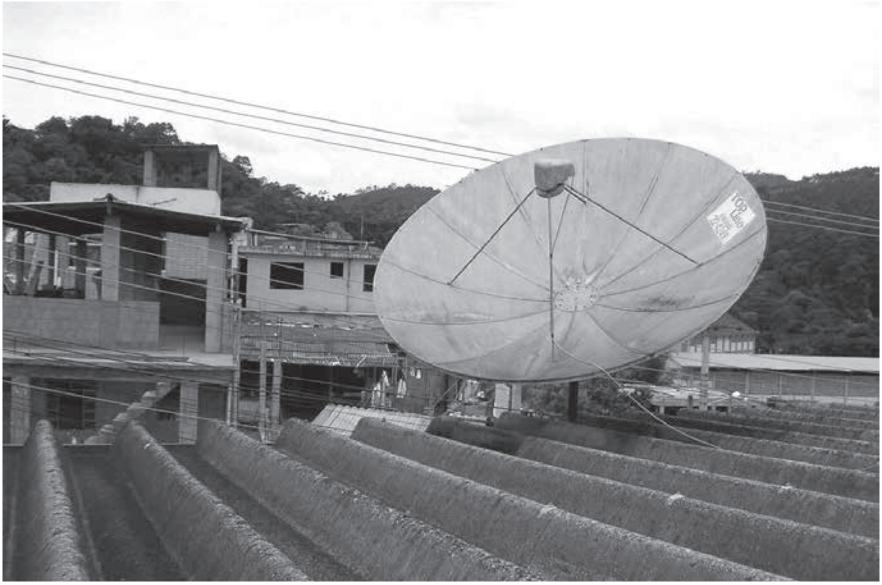
Civil Society's Fight for a Democratic and Pluralistic Media in Brazil

BIA BARBOSA
Public policy graduate and journalist specialized in human rights. She has worked and collaborated with mainstream and alternative media both in Brazil and abroad, including Radio France Internationale and Al Jazeera. She is currently the coordinator of Intervozes, an organisation that has been defending freedom of expression in Brazil for ten years.

Over the last decade, social movements, trade unions, consumer protection organisations, organisations defending women's rights, racial equality and children's rights, to name just a few, have been arduously battling for a new regulatory framework for the Brazilian media.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) set down that every person has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; a right which includes the freedom to have an opinion, to seek, receive and pass on information and ideas, without interference, through whatever means and regardless of borders. More than sixty years later, in a context of mediated communications, safeguarding the act of speaking and being heard means assessing this complex system of transmitting and circulating information in modern societies, in a way that does not discriminate or exclude any group. Because when the mass media is the main space in which information and culture is circulated, and represents some of the most important outlets for referencing values and creating public opinion, the major media arena, where views and society projects are disputed, should always be a space that reflects diversity and pluralism, and should never be controlled by private or government interests.

Yet in Brazil, only six national private open-air television networks and their 140 affiliated regional groups control the 700 communication outlets. There are no mechanisms which prevent a single broadcaster monopolising the television



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Brazil is one of the countries that spends the most time watching television.

audience. When one considers the main factors used to measure concentration in the broadcasting market – audience share and advertising revenue – the sum of audience shares for the four largest television broadcasters make up 83.3% and 97.2% respectively[1]. Distribution of the federal government's advertising budget follows the same trend. As these funds are allocated exclusively on the basis of audience or circulation rates, these resources ultimately reinforce mass control and the trend of turning the Brazilian television market into an oligopoly.

It is worth remembering that Brazil is one of the countries whose population spends most time in front of the television. More than 65% of the population watches, on average, 3.5 hours of television a day, according to a survey published in February 2014 by the Brazilian Secretariat of Social Communications of the Presidency[2]. Yet only 47% regularly use the Internet and 25% read newspapers. There are no laws or public policies in the country to encourage the emergence and sustainability of small-scale circulation outlets or those which are public and community-based.

Similarly, the main articles of the Federal Constitution concerning Social Communication continue to be unregulated, including Article 220, which would prevent an oligopoly of the media and Article 223, which establishes the principle of complementarity between public, private and state systems in broadcasting. As a result, most of today's radio and television broadcasters are controlled by private companies.

[1] CADE Report 08012.006504/97-11 and Donos da Mídia (www.donosdamidia.com.br), Mídia Dados (2009), and K. Jimenez, São Paulo State. Available at www.observatoriodaimprensa.com.br
[2] Brazilian Media Survey 2014 – Hábitos de Consumo de Mídia pela População Brasileira. Secretariat of Social Communications of the Presidency. February, 2014. Available at: http://observatoriodaimprensa.com

Meanwhile, community radio stations are pursued as if they were criminals and, if they wish to legalise their stations, they are subjected to restrictive rules which set a maximum of one frequency per location, a one kilometre radius maximum range and forbid commercial advertising as a means for broadcasters to support themselves. Recently, because of the country's decision to adopt digital television and radio standards, the federal government gave in to private sector lobbying, ignoring national surveys and the potential to develop the national industry, and let go of a significant opportunity to include more players in the media and democratise communications.

The lack of fair conditions for exercising freedom of expression, reflected in the limited plurality and diversity in the major media outlets, is thus one of the major problems faced by Brazil's fragile democracy.

The First National Communication Conference

In order to deal with this situation, organisations belonging to the so-called movement for the democratisation of communication began a campaign in 2006, demanding the First National Communication Conference. The tradition of holding a conference on other public policy areas in Brazil had never been applied to communication. Almost every time a strategic decision concerning the sector was made, no one paid any attention to what the population wanted. Communication policies were always understood to be a matter for the government and for those with a direct economic interest in them, i.e., the sector's business people. It is no coincidence that, by and large, private interests prevailed, to the detriment of public interest.

Demonstrations and protests resulted in the First National Communication Conference, which took place in 2009. For the first time, the Brazilian State established a formal consultation mechanism for all of society, defining standards and processes for the communication sector. The preparatory and official stages of the Conference, held in the 27 Federal States, involved around 15,000 people from a wide range of sectors. Trade union federations, women's movements, racial equality movements, journalists, radio broadcasters, youth, child and adolescent networks, people with disabilities, researchers, lesbian, gay and transsexual movements, the student movement, human rights entities, organisations directly involved in the democratisation of communication and business people from different sectors, all came together to discuss which processes and guidelines should be adopted for the sector.

The process marked the beginning of a new chapter in Brazil's communication movement, which now included new and important players. In addition, more than 600 resolutions approved at the Conference represented progress in view of the current configuration of the Brazilian media system. The resolutions clearly pointed to an urgent need to update the country's regulatory communications framework, based on the fundamental principles of the right to communication, social participation and respecting and encouraging diversity.

After the conference, UNESCO, which had been following the process in Brazil, published a study with a series of recommendations for the country, aimed at tackling problems in the broadcasting sector[3]. One of the main recommendations was to hand over control for implementing regulation policy in the mass media to an independent authority, better equipped to act impartially on matters of public interest and remain uninfluenced by political or industrial interests. The ability to act impartially would be fundamental in the quest to protect freedom of expression.

Popular Initiative Bill for a Democratic Media

In response to society's appeals and countless studies in the same vein, before the end of the Lula government, the then Chief Minister of the Social Communications Secretariat, Franklin Martins, prepared a draft bill on the subject. However, the text was shelved by the new minister Paulo Bernardo, already under the management of Dilma Rousseff, and was never made public. In view of the government's backtracking, the movement decided to launch a new initiative.

In May 2013, the National Forum for the Democratisation of Communication (FNDC)[4], which brings together dozens of entities and activists advocating changes to the Brazilian media system, including Intervozes, launched the Popular Initiative Bill for a Democratic Media[5]. This bill was the result of debates and dialogues that followed the Communication Conference. The project's aim is to collect more than a million signatures from the Brazilian electorate and to go to the National Congress with extensive public support. It is a political instrument with the purpose of putting pressure on the federal government and a tool for social mobilisation aiming to extend the debate to include the whole of the society.

The Democratic Media Law presents measures for regulating the system, aiming to, inter alia:

- Promote and encourage national culture in all its diversity and plurality;
- Foster diversity in the media whether it be regional, ethnic-racial, gender, social, class, age or sexual orientation;
- Guarantee the complementarity of public, private and state communication systems;
- Protect children and adolescents from all forms of exploitation, negligence and violence through the media;
- Guarantee full access to the media, paying particular attention to people with disabilities;
- Promote popular participation in decision-making in the communications system.

The bill would entail setting up a National Communication Council, an independent

[3] Mendel Toby and Salomon Eve (2011). The regulatory framework for broadcasting : An international best practice survey for Brazilian stakeholders. Brasilia: Unesco. Available on http://unesdoc.unesco.org
[4] www.fndc.org.br
[5] Full version available at www.paraexpressaraliberdade.org.br

body maintained by the Executive, with a duty to follow and assess the implementation of public policies and regulations in the sector. The regulation and supervision of legal and contractual obligations concerning programming and defining standard provisions, regulatory actions, their supervision and the application of sanctions would be the responsibility of Ancine, the regulatory agency already operating in the country. Lastly, an ombudsman would be employed to channel consultations and deal with complaints from the population.

Unsurprisingly, any initiative which relaxes broadcasting rules faces strong opposition from the major media groups, which have historically used the space of public television concessions to promote the idea that any regulation would be tantamount to censorship. So, Venício A. de Lima, a researcher and professor at the University of Brasilia, warns that the market continues to be "the only criterion for, and way to measure freedom of expression and freedom of the press that the media industry accepts".[6]

A direct consequence of the stance, adopted by the major media groups, is that it has put a stop to the public debate on the need to regulate the media and improve democracy. However, those who currently carry out censorship are the media themselves, deciding what society wants to watch and hear, confident that their privileges will remain untouched. Thus, the prevailing scenario is one which only makes it harder for the entire population to exercise freedom of expression and one which benefits the few companies benefiting from the sector's intense concentration.

Part of the population wants to see this landscape changed, at least with regard to broadcasters programme schedules. A survey published in 2013 by the Perseu Abramo Foundation[7] illustrated that 70.96% of Brazilians believe there should be more television content rules. Most people are in favour of not showing "violent or humiliating content" on television against the black population (54%), against gays and lesbians (54%) and against women (53%). Participants believed that "humour ridiculing people" should not be broadcast (50%), or should only be broadcast according to certain rules (43%). Similarly, 61% said they were in favour of television not gratuitously exposing the female body and 60% of not showing corpses.

Therefore, the population and a significant proportion of civil society understands that there is a need to change the current media system. The challenge is turning this analysis into a reality. Undoubtedly, the fight for a democratic State in Brazil and for a truly just society, without oppression, means reclaiming the media environment as a public space, with room for everyone. Without this, freedom of expression, the right to communication and Brazilian democracy itself will remain incomplete.

[6] *Liberdade de expressão vs Liberdade de imprensa: Direito à comunicação e democracia*. São Paulo: Publisher Brasil.
[7] Public opinion poll "Democrazação da Midia".

Latin America Wants to Make the News

MAGALÍ RICCIARDI YAKIN
Argentinean journalist and specialist in international relations.

What is happening today in Latin America? What do we know about our neighbouring countries? What is the latest news item we can remember about Bolivia or Uruguay? What are the main headlines in the international pages of the newspapers we read? How many of these are about this region, and how many are about events in the United States or Western Europe? Regionally, which news items predominate: politics, crime, sport, celebrities, or natural disasters? Finally, in order to develop some hypotheses, what are their sources?

Taking the main Argentinian broadsheets of today (11/6) as an example, it is very difficult to know what is happening in Latin America because the papers supporting the government (*Tiempo Argentino*) as well as the opposition (*Clarín, La Nación*), publish the same articles on the Pope, Spain, the United States and Israel. There is just a few small articles on the elections in Colombia which, despite its geographical proximity, uses agencies AP, AFP, DPA, ANSA and EFE as its main sources. Why recur to giant companies in the United States and Europe for regional information?

Transnational agencies: the invisible hand in communication

As explained by Ignacio Muro Benayas, director of the Spanish agency EFE, "little is known" about news agencies. However, most information in the media, whether it be graphic or digital, is provided by them. "Agencies are in charge of maintaining a flow of news to citizens through various media; hence their main activities continue to be identified with the role of *wholesaler*, a role which is pivotal to its main business"[1].

[1] Muro Benayas Ignacio. *Globalización de la información y agencias de noticias*. Barcelona: Paidós, p.22



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Newsagent,, Buenos Aires.

They have numerous journalists in various places, who send information of the events they are covering to the headquarters, where it is then distributed to clients – newspapers, magazines, radio and TV, websites, amongst others – as soon as possible. They are providers of the raw material with which the media makes the news, and this is why we often see the same stories in different media, even identical paragraphs.

Even though at a national level there exists several public and private agencies, due to primarily economic difficulties, i.e., the expense of hiring reporters all over the world, very few have an international presence. The international scene is dominated by the American Associated Press (AP), British Reuters, and French France Presse (AFP); followed by the Spanish EFE, German DPA and Italian ANSA. These five agencies account for 80 percent of international information production, a fact for which they are denounced as implementing an oligarchical structure of global information.

It is no coincidence that this structure reproduces, as reflected by the international system, a correlation of power, in which a main hegemonic power exerts control together with several lesser powers. But why are the powers within the global communication system not the same ones that currently dominate global political-economic relations? In the words of journalist Frank González, former president of Cuban agency Prensa Latina: "In the second half of the 19th century, Reuters (United Kingdom), Wolff (Germany) and Havas (France), formed a so-called cartel of news agencies, in which they carved up the media market, according to the geo-political interests of their nations"[2].

[2] González, Frank (May 2009).

These agencies, belonging to the colonial powers of the time, signed a "closed territory" agreement, where they could only obtain and distribute information in their territories, if authorized. Thus, they were the "masters" of the system until the Second World War, when they had to give way to agencies from the United States, who were powerful enough to dominate the international scene at all levels – economic, political, military, cultural and information. In line with the liberal principals of their country, they burst onto the scene with claims for "free flow of information".

Paradoxical but predictable, there was not much that was "free" about the transnational information system and in step with the interests of the United States, it became increasingly concentrated in fewer hands. According to Frank González: "These global capitalist agencies increased control over the international media market, intensifying the relations of domination and cultural dependence between the rich industrialized North and the impoverished and underdeveloped South"[3]. Even so, in line with the decolonization process and the Non-Aligned Movement, complaints about this imbalance were beginning to be heard in various international forums. New countries, who were looking for recognition, knew that if they could not get their voices heard, and continued to rely on information produced and distributed by the North, they would not be able to consolidate their sovereignty. In 1980 they took the debate to UNESCO, where the MacBride report promoted a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), which in turn was part of the New International Economic Order (NIEO). However, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher formed a common front and by the 1989 conference, demands for information sovereignty and equality were forgotten, making way for their favourite topics: the free market and free enterprise masked by concepts of freedom of expression and freedom of information. Why were they so concerned about maintaining the status quo on communication?

Power may be economy, but so is politics and culture

Brazilian researcher Julia Faria Camargo explains: "The stories constructed by the media are usually the only source of information the public has about a particular subject, thus, they are able to form opinions and views on international events. Manipulation and propaganda unjustly legitimize atrocities that recur throughout history[4]". This is why it is important to identify the media as a relevant actor on the international scene.

Argentinian journalist and researcher Luis Lázzaro[5] also highlights the economic role of these concentrated media groups: "they have a double strategic role in the extended

[3] Ibid.
[4] Camargo Julia (2009). *Mídia e relações internacionais. Lições da invasão do Iraque em 2003*. Curitiba: Juruá p.20.
[5] Lazzaro Luis (2012). *La batalla de la comunicación. De los tanques mediáticos a la ciudadanía de la información*. Buenos Aires, Colihue.

reproduction of capital". Not only do they act as "rhetorical agents who legitimize capitalist ideas and transform them into a hegemonic social discourse, transmitting views of the world and ways of life that transfer the regulation of collective demands to the markets", but are also "prominent economic agents in global markets". These few transnational agencies respond to, and/or make up, the Great World Power.

According to Muro Benayas: "It is in the media where the pressure and influence of powerful groups are multiplied tenfold or a hundredfold, materialized through funding. First, and whenever possible, as shareholders, then as buyers of publicity space. A few major advertisers pool their investments into select media, which enables them to interlink their relations and expand their influence"[6].Ultimately, political, economic and cultural power is closely linked, fused to dominate, control and reproduce the international system according to their interests. They are the three axes of the World Power.

"Brothers and sisters unite" so that "you are not devoured by the outside"

in the last decade, Latin America left behind its nefarious neoliberal model, and began a major process of social transformation which the Brazilian Emir Sader[7] baptised as "Post neoliberal": recovering the role of the state, regulating markets, economic growth through distribution of wealth, inclusion and regional integration. The objective is to recuperate national sovereignty and use governing models that benefit the majority, excluded throughout history. As expected, the Global Power, accustomed to using the region for its benefit, did not take this well and tried to regain supremacy by any means possible.

In this dispute, communication is a cornerstone in the pursuit of their objectives. According to Muro Benayas, "information dependence accentuates economic dependence because, by making the exchange of ideas and knowledge between neighbouring countries more difficult, this facilitates misunderstandings and historical grudges that promote isolationism. It becomes a burden on the territorial structure of the regions and their economic and social integration"[8].

What alternatives does Latin America have left in order to continue its process of political economic transformation if the international information it consumes comes from the power centres that want to stop it? How will it know what is happening to its neighbours if international news deals mainly with Europe and the United States, and only mentions Latin America when talking about violence, crime or natural disasters?

[6] Muro Benayas Igniacio, Op.cit.
[7] Sader Emir (2009). *La nuevo* topo. *Los caminos de la izquienda latinoamericana*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores argentina.
[8] Muro Benayas Igniacio, Op.cit. p.26.



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During the 3rd News Agencies World Congress held in Argentina in 2010, discussions between authorities of global agencies highlighted two competing political models. While the EFE representative boasted about having broadcast the Bolivian president kicking an opponent during a football match – which helps the social imagination to see him as violent primate – the Uruguayan colleague resumed the spirit of the NWICO and together with Latin American peers, came together to analyse how to pluralize and democratize the global information system through the integration of public policies; trade-related communication versus social communication. The Great Global Struggle reproduced at communication level.

If internal regulation, where the Presidents themselves are piloting the struggle against media monopolies, is so difficult, then how can voices be multiplied and pluralized at an international level, where there are no supranational powers and the institutional route via international bodies answers to the hegemony? After exchanging experiences and expressing awareness that the region shares similar problems, the authorities of the Latin American agencies decided to join forces in order to be heard. In 2011 the Unión Latinoamericana de Agencias de Noticias (ULAN)[9] was established, a regional unit for producing information whose main objective is to promote the democratization of communication in Latin America, and contribute to the regional integration of its people.

[9] It is formed by the Argentinean news agencies (Télam), also chaired by; Bolivia (ABI), Brazil (EBC), Cuba (Prensa Latina), Ecuador (ANDES), Guatemala (AGN), Mexico (Notimex), Paraguay (IP), Venezuela (AVN) y Peru (Andina). According to its statute, it looks to promote a regional information agency and a collective democratic and plural platform, based on a Latin American and Caribbean vision. Amongst its objectives are increasing and facilitating the flow of information produced in the region, promoting people's right to information, freedom of expression, democracy, peace and understanding amongst nations. Furthermore, it rejects all forms of racism, colonialism and economic and cultural dependence, and promotes cooperation with other agency organizations. See: http://agenciasulan.org/estatuto

As explained by Brazilian researcher Dênis de Moraes: "Uniting at national, regional and supranational levels is key to the struggle against hegemonic forces accustomed to decades of privilege. We have to work towards supranational fronts of resistance and mobilization"[10].

In these initial years, ULAN has proved that it is a regional actor determined to fight within the international communication system, especially against media campaigns and attacks against its nations and integrationist processes. One of its weapons will be put to the test in August, with the launching of the Agencia de Noticias del Sur (ANSUR) portal. It is a long and difficult process, but if we return to the initial question, we now know that there is a new voice in Latin America, and it wants to tell us and the world what is happening in our countries and to our neighbours. It wants to make itself heard, and it's getting louder.

[10] De Moraes Dênis (2011). *La cruzada de los medios en América Latina. Gobiernos progresistas y políticas de comunicación*. Buenos Aires: Paidós. 2011. p.141.

Journalism in Europe: Two Movements Striving for Freedom and Quality

INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF JOURNALISTS

The International Alliance of Journalists is continuing its work in Europe, teaming up with major partners so as to come up with concrete proposals which aim, as always, to improve the conditions of journalism and the processes of creating information, ensuring they are respectful of ethical principles.

The fourth estate is very enticing, perhaps too enticing; there are an increasing number of situations where independence and pluralism of information are under threat in EU countries. In Hungary, President Orban has conferred the Media Authority and the Media Council, two organisations run by members of the ruling party, total control over all informative content. In Great Britain, the Murdoch Empire is at the root of politics' embroilment in the media. Romania views information as a "potential threat" to national security. And Reporters Without Borders have ranked Bulgaria, whose media system is tightly entangled with political power and organised crime, at the bottom of the rung for freedom of information.

One would have thought that the "Italian anomaly" we have been lugging around since 1994, would result in a European vaccination against such a pathology. Instead, the European Union, falling short in its obligations towards its citizens, has washed its hands of it, hiding behind the shadowy excuse of a lack of authority. The result is that the instance of Italy, which should have rung out like an alarm bell, has become a textbook case for other European countries.

These developments have opened up again a debate on press freedom, which is generally (and arrogantly) seen to be threatened only outside the European Union, since we take such a basic freedom for granted in the cradle of democracy.

This incited the International Alliance of Journalists and European Alternatives to set up the European Initiative for Media Pluralism, in 2011, a transnational platform whose objective is to find a European solution to the issue of freedom and pluralism of information.

The European Congress on media pluralism, which represented the third step in creating a European initiative for media pluralism, and which was held in Bologna in May 2011, identified two clear positionings: firstly, request the European Commission to progressively carry out its strategy for media pluralism in the EU, which has been waylaid since 2009 without any plausible explanation. The strategy included studying the risk of a lack of pluralism in the EU's member states using a costly software (the Monitor) – an instrument which the Commission swiftly put back in the drawer. Secondly, use a tool like the European Citizen's Initiative to force the European Commission to assume its own authority in regards to protecting free and pluralistic information, and to put its legislative tools to use by intervening in Member States where this fundamental right is being violated and put a stop to it.

The first breakthrough came in August 2013 when the European Commission accepted our proposal for a European Citizen's Initiative, proving that it has indeed the authority to do this, as regulations only authorise it to validate ECIs that fall under its authority. Moreover, thanks to a pilot project presented through the European Parliament, we succeeded in getting the Monitor for media pluralism up and running. It was financed by the European Parliament and has been updated, simplified and implemented in nine EU countries. The results of this first test will be released in September 2014.

A year-long campaign in EU countries in order to collect the million signatures required for the European Citizen's Initiative has only reinforced our belief that there is still a long way to go. From one angle, it seems that our appeals to the EU are fruitful, stimulating concrete institutional discussion over what the solutions are and how they should be instigated: setting up obligatory independent media authorities, a transparency register of media owners, ongoing monitoring of the European media ecosystem and standardisation of anti-concentration legislation across all EU countries. Then again, we're witness to a deterioration in information quality, journalist insecurity, the gradual disappearance of economic models for mainstream media, the flawed ideology of the network as a solution to all problems pertaining to freedom of information, all of which is forcing us to meet new challenges which, in a now unchecked world, are cropping up and changing at an unprecedented speed.
Structuring our European platform as an international organisation will enable us to create an entity capable of detecting and monitoring new and existent threats to freedom of information, while at the same time creating an informative system offering mutual support and solidarity in periods of crisis. The European Media


© Sébastien Bertrand

European Commission.

Initiative seeks to become an influential representative for all organisations in the media sector, participating in the decision-making process, whether they be local or national, in or outside the EU.

Along with air, water and culture, we wish to state loud and clear that information is also a commons.

The Manifesto of the EFJ

In light of the current media situation, it is up to the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) (the main journalist organisation in Europe, with 320 000 members across 39 countries) to defend, more than ever before, the rights of journalists and to promote journalism as a "commons".

In May 2014, the EFJ saw the European elections as a chance to present candidates with a Manifesto, aiming to reawaken pluralism in the media and press freedom in Europe.

The International Journalists' Alliance and EFJ is now going to pursue this work post-election and follow up on the actions taken and decisions made by those elected representatives who signed the Manifesto. As a signature represents a commitment, it seems urgent that the concrete proposals in this document are implemented and seen as a binding obligation (The full document can be downloaded at: www.ifj.org).

We have only referred to recommendations from ten of the Manifesto's chapters. Together they deal with current problems that must be resolved in order to preserve free, independent and plural information and salvage the founding integral principles of democracy in Europe.

• • •

1. Democracy needs independent journalism

- Maintain a clear journalistic exemption for processing data in EU Data Protection law (Directive 95/46/EC);
- Domestic law and practice in member states should provide for explicit and clear protection of the right of journalists to protect confidential sources (in accordance with Article 10 of the Convention);
- Media freedom, pluralism and independent journalism is a pre-condition for EU membership; and measures must be taken to monitor violations of EU laws regulating these issues;
- State officials shall not be protected against criticism and insult. Journalists should not be imprisoned, or media outlets closed, for critical reports on state officials.

2. Europe needs media pluralism

- Media ownership and economic influence over media must be made transparent. Legislation must be enforced against media monopolies and dominant market positions among the media;
- Media outlets should have editorial independence from media owners, for instance by agreeing with media owners on codes of conduct for editorial independence, to ensure that media owners do not interfere in daily editorial work or compromise impartial journalism;
- State officials should not be able to pursue professional media activities while in office;
- Support the European Initiative for Media Pluralism (sign here: http://www.mediainitiative.eu).

3. Rights to association and collective bargaining for all

- Establish/reinforce social dialogue in the media sector both at national and European levels; especially in the new Member States where social dialogue in the print and online sector rarely exists;
- *E*qual rights and equal treatments for all forms of employment including freelances;
- Promote best practices (such as the EFJ Freelance Charter) led by the unions negotiate on behalf of all workers irrespective of their employment status including freelancers;
- Ensure competition law does not undermine the right to collective bargaining. Application of competition law should take into account the imbalance of negotiating power facing the weaker party who *are often individual freelancers*.

4. Authors' rights – Fair contracts for all

- Ensure full recognition of journalists as authors and fair remuneration for each use of their works;
- Ban buy-out contracts that contain unfair terms and conditions asking journalists to transfer all exclusive rights to employers;
- Ban the use of abusive clauses in employment/copyright contracts that demand journalists to sign away their rights for unlimited uses of their work at a lump-sum fee;
- Review employment/copyright contractual terms and conditions when the remuneration received by the author is inequitable.

5. Working conditions affect quality in journalism

- Journalists should have adequate working contracts with sufficient social protection, so as not to compromise their impartiality and independence;
- Member States should ensure that journalists' working conditions comply with the provision of the European Social Charter;
- Advocate the use of collective agreements as the best practice to enforce social and labour rights of journalists;
- Regulate the use of individual contracts that undermines the social and labour rights of journalists;
- Improve gender equality in journalism, particularly the gender pay gap.

6. Journalism as a public good

- Support a sustainable funding model for an independent public service broadcasting (PSB) that serves the public interest;
- Avoid closure, downsizing and restructuring measures that affect the quality of content and staffing in PSB;
- Public service broadcasters must be protected against political interference in their daily management and their editorial work. Senior management positions should be refused to people with clear party political affiliations;
- Regulatory authorities for the broadcasting media must function in an unbiased and effective manner, for instance when granting licences.

7. Investigative journalism needs free access to information

- Open access to EU documents for citizens and journalists;
- Member States should facilitate journalists' access to public data;
- Make EU Transparency Register mandatory for all lobbying activities.

8. Investing in the future of journalism

- Support initiatives to explore new ways of funding the future of journalism;
- The EU and employers' organisations should invest in skills and jobs. Journalists, including freelancers, should be entitled to training schemes;
- Promote media literacy, especially among the new generations, to sustain the future of journalism;

- Support lifelong learning of journalists (including freelancers) throughout their careers.

9. Safety at work

- A zero tolerance policy should be adopted to penalise violations of journalists' rights to safety at work, in particular when working in dangerous zones;
- Safety training should be provided for journalists, including freelances, by employers' organisations;
- National laws that prevent journalists from covering demonstrations should be prohibited; and the safety of journalists who covers these events should be guaranteed.

10. Building trust and accountability through ethical journalism

- Promote self-regulatory measures or bodies such as ethical codes and press councils to reinforce high standards in journalism; and decisions by such bodies should be implemented and enforced;
- Encourage editors and management to enforce codes of ethics and ensure quality and accountability in journalism;
- Support initiatives that enforce diversity in media content through inclusion of voices from all sections of the community.

Community Radio in Africa in 2014: Overview and Perspectives

ALYMANA BATHILY
Media and communications consultant. He holds a degree in philosophy from the University of Paris VIII and a degree in sociology from the University of Dakar.

Community radio emerged in Africa following mass protests against one-party systems, military dictatorships and apartheid introduced in the early nineties which resulted in the "liberalisation of radio waves" across most countries.

From 1995, in several countries including South Africa, Mali and Senegal, legal and regulatory authorities began to put an end to the State monopoly over radio waves that had previously been in force. Then "international radio", "private commercial radio" and "community radio" appeared on the African radio landscape alongside "state radio", which is now called "public service radio" even if the reality is that in most countries neither its content nor how it operates has really changed.

The current landscape of community radio

As defined by the African Charter on Broadcasting, adopted following the seminar organised by UNESCO on May 3-5 in Windhoek, Namibia to which African and International media support organisations[1] participated, "community broadcasting is broadcasting which is for, by and about the community, whose ownership and management is representative of the community, which pursues a social development agenda, and which is non-profit".

[1] MISA (Media Institute of Southern Africa), AMARC (World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters), Article 19: Global Campaign for Free Expression, APC (Association for Progressive Communications and SACOD (Southern African Communications for Development).



© Robin Taylor

The Multimedia Cultural Jamana now has it own community radio network.

This definition put forward by the African Charter on Broadcasting, which refers both to the community's ownership and participation in managing radio, with the goal of ensuring the community has access to information and culture, and which is a non-profit service, has only been used in the legislation of English-speaking countries[2].

The legislation of French-speaking countries is less specific, referring sometimes to "community radio", sometimes to "associative radio", sometimes to "local radio" and even to "rural radio", but they all refer to what seems central to community radio: both a commitment to ensure specific community access to information and culture, and the non-profit nature of this service[3]. Another feature of this kind of radio, and to which all legislation refers, is the production of original content in line with the needs of their audience and of local culture.

Malian legislation requires that at least 70% of the content broadcast by community radio represents "local production". In Senegal 75% of community radio is in local languages on subjects of local interest. In Niger, this percentage even reaches 90%[4].

[2] See for instance the South African legislation: https://www.icasa.org.za/LegislationRegulations/Acts/BroadcastingAct/tabid/89/Default.aspx Or that of Kenya: http://kenyaelections07.marsgroupkenya.org/pdfs/Acts/CHAPTER_221_Kenya_Broadcasting_Corporation_ACT.pdf

[3] See for example Article 4 of Decree N° 02-22 7/P-RM of May 10 2002 concerning the status of private broadcasting services by wireless terrestrial route and frequency modulation of the Republic of Mali. http://www.amarc.org/documents/presentations/Les_RC_et_cadre_legislatif_au_Mali.pdf
And Order N°2011-75 of April 30 2011 concerning the promotion of the National Council of Audiovisual Communication of the Ivory Coast http://www.communication.gouv.ci/?code=com&com=4

[4] Alymana Bathily (2004). *La Radio communautaire aujourd'hui au Sénégal: réalités, contraintes et perspectives*, AMARC Africa, and *La Radio Communautaire au Niger: contexte, participation et viabilité*, AMARC Africa.

There are urban, suburban and rural-based African community radio stations, and they are run by associations, non-governmental organisations, youth organisations, women's organisations, famers' organisations and even specific ethnic and cultural groups.

As far as we know, there has not yet been an exhaustive record of these types of radio across the continent.

Yet we do know, for instance, that 1079 denominational and nondenominational "community radio stations" operate in the Democratic Republic of the Congo[5], more than 200 in Mali, 115 in South Africa, 108 in Niger, 65 in Senegal and 60 on the Ivory Coast.

To our knowledge, out of Africa's 54 countries, only 20 don't have community radio (Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Gabon, Guinea Equatorial, Lesotho, Libya, Morocco, Mauritius, Mauritania, Nigeria, Sahraouian Republic, Sao Tomé, Seychelles, Sudan, Swaziland et Zimbabwe).

The total number of community radio stations over the 34 countries sits somewhere between 2,000 and 3,000.

Good practices of community radio.

While radio had been perceived up to this point as a "deaf person who talks to mute people"[6], the advent of community radio meant not only could ordinary people access information and entertainment in their own language, which corresponded to their own cultural norms, but they could also hear their own voices. "The radio has changed our life. With it we feel like we are part of Mali. Before we listened to the Ivory Coast radio stations. Now we can keep in touch with what is going on here. We can hear news about the cotton industry. We can make announcements over the radio if we have something important to tell members of our family. We can listen to music from our village,", explains a listener of Radio Benso of Kolondieba, a village of cotton farmers in southern Mali[7]. In addition to enabling millions of poor and marginalised Africans to enjoy the right to expression and information, community radio has also contributed to establishing peace and averting conflict, to enable poor and illiterate populations to participate in governance as well as in development initiatives.

Thus radio Life in Zorzor in Lofa County, Liberia, in a region where people displaced after the civil war represents 95% of the population, is said to have played a major role, according to a number of testimonials including that of the chief of

[5] Democratic Republic of Congo Local Radio Directory (2012). Published by the DRC Federation of Community Radio Stations.
[6] An expression in Mali at the time.
[7] See the article 'Les radios communautaires, la voix des pauvres'; Afrique Renouveau, July 2005 (in French). http://www.un.org/africarewal/fr

police, in re-establishing peace by broadcasting the very palpable tension that existed between the Mandingue and Lorma[8] ethnic groups.

Likewise, according to the testimonial of Mr. Boniface Ojok from the Justice and Reconciliation organisation, the community radio Gulu FM, based in Gulu in Northern Uganda, a region that for years suffered atrocities of the Lord Resistance Army, succeeded with its programme "Dwog cen paco" (Go home) "in encouraging rebels to come out of hiding." This programme went so far as to broadcast testimonials like that of the child soldier Oryema.

"It didn't mean anything to me to kill someone… It was only until I started listening to Radio Mega… And I heard the radio talking about the houses that we were setting fire to. So I started thinking and wondering if this war was normal. Then I started wondering if there wasn't something better to do that stay in hiding…". Community radio has also played a major role in contributing to the efficiency of public health programmes.

Between 2004-2005, a programme on health and sanitation called "Kumuzi Kwathu" ("In Our Village"), produced and broadcast by the community radio stations Breeze FM and Radio Chikaya, in Lundazi, Zambia, reached 600 000 listeners in the Orientale province and played a role in changing behaviour in regards to HIV AIDS and reproductive health.

According to John Mphanza, Chairman of the grassroots community organisation Feni Development Committee, based in the village of Nthobimbi in the Chipata district, "Our Village made people change the way they think about HIV AIDS … A lot of people who thought that the epidemic was due to witchcraft understand now that it is actually a sickness… Even older people are voluntarily coming forward for screening and advice on how to prevent the infection".

In terms of reproductive health, the programme organised exchanges between professionals and community health leaders to discuss the issues and expectations of the local community…

"Traditional midwives now take more precautions because they learnt about procedures which avoid infections that can occur during childbirth on the radio", says Jessie Tambo, a midwife-trained villager[9].

Community radio has also revealed its efficiency as an instrument for facilitating local governance and represents a way for local populations to make politicians accountable. The community radio Simli, in Northern Ghana, thus broadcast an interactive

[8] An Assessment of the Role of Community Radio in Peacebuilding and Development: Case Studies in Liberia and Sierra Leone (2009). *Search for common Ground* (http://www.amarc.org).
[9] www.irinnews.org/printreport.aspx?reportid=51815

program on government policies and initiatives where listeners could ask questions and make comments. That is what Aishatu, a female community leader, is so excited about: "We can now talk with our MPs over the radio. We know now that they are there to make development happen: they can't cheat anymore and they have to give us development. Before they went to Accra and forgot that we voted for them. But now Radio Simli questions them and brings them closer to us"[10].

Obstacles and drawbacks of Community Radio in Africa

Despite the Community Radio project's remarkable achievements, of which we have tried to give a brief overview, it has not always been successful and has run into some serious drawbacks.

These failures and drawbacks are largely due to:

- The fact that "community radio" is too often actually an initiative of an individual or a small group, offering no place for the community to participate and serving primarily to promote that individual or group. Stations are sometimes even linked to a political party if not a religious group.
- The unequal participation of women: In Niger and Senegal, the countries that are most advanced in this respect, women represent 39.6% of the total staff but only 10% of management positions[11]. Furthermore, women's participation in programmes and the representation of women as information sources remains very low.
- The legal and regulatory framework that allocates less stations to community radio than to other sectors, charges them high rates and even inflicts regulations restricting their content. So while the Charter on Broadcasting recommends an equal division of the three sectors – public service, private commercial and community radio – the reality is that in several countries the legislation limits the frequencies allocated to this sector[12].

In Ghana for instance, of the 316 frequencies the National Communication Authority (N.C.A) attributed to broadcasters from 1996 to 2013, only 12 of these were community stations. In other countries, it is the cost of acquiring a frequency that is off-putting: in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), a fee of 15,000 US dollars is required with any request for accreditation. In Uganda and in Burkina Faso, the annual fee is as high as 1,200 US dollars.

In other countries like Senegal, the regulation restricting content represents a major constraint, stipulating that "community radio can only broadcast news,

[10] Seidu Al-hassan, Alhassan Andani and Abdulai Abdul-Malik (2011). The Role of Community Radio in livelihood Improvement: the case of Simli Radio, The Journal of Field Action Report, Vol. 5, http://factsreports.revues.org/869
[11] Source Bathily Alymana, op.cit.
[12] See Presentation of the South African Broadcasting Act.



© Ghana Decides

Radio Justice. Ghana.

messages or debates of a political nature"[13].

Community radio's reduced access to ICT represents another major drawback. Although 65% of community radio stations, including those in rural areas, own mobile phones[14], 31.5% don't have an Internet connection and 33.6% don't even have a computer[15].

Lastly, there is the economic environment, which often makes the economic and technical viability of community radio stations uncertain.

Community radio's viability effectively relies on contributions from the community (in the form of unpaid voluntary work and financial donations), advertising and sponsoring from community-based companies, and support from the government, the international community and 'donors'[16].

Yet very often, due to the fact that radio is not deeply anchored in the community, the community doesn't make a significant contribution to radio.

This, combined with a disproportionate dependence on "donors", inadequate

[13] Specifications for community radio stations in Senegal, Article 19. This provision was not overlooked until community radio broadcasters went on strike after the frequencies of two Dakar radio stations (Radio Oxyjeunes ad Radio Afia) were suspended for two months following broadcasted interviews of candidates for the municipal elections.
[14] According to a study by African Farm Radio Research International "How ICTs are changing rural radio in Africa" www.farmradio.org
[15] "Radio et TICs en Afrique: connectivité et usages" (2008) , Panos: West Africa.
[16] Muswede, Tavhiso, 2009.

ability to generate revenue through advertising and sponsoring and insufficient government support[17], explains why many community radio programmes are inspired by international NGOs and don't actually respond to the needs of the community. It also explains why they are often incapable of taking charge of the radio's operation over the long term.

A comprehensive programme restructuring community radio in Africa is also needed. Such a programme would primarily involve:

- Ensuring that community radio is deeply anchored in its community with representatives from the community participating in Management Committees and establishing programme schedules.
- Adopting the rule of the umbrella association's community radio General Assembly and its management committee, stipulating equality in all instances and across all programmes, ensuring the participation of women at all levels, and making sure their voices are heard on air.
- Training community radio management staff in marketing and fundraising techniques.
- Organising a government appeal to set up a funding and support network, independent of government and financial backers and managed transparently, like the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) in South Africa.[18] The funding for such a network should be ongoing and should include national budget contributions, revenue from telecommunication operators (collected by regulatory bodies) and "donors" .
- Such a reorganisation would enable community radio to continue its contribution to Africa's social, economic and cultural development.[19]

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[19] Community Participation, the backbone of successful community radio station, *Community Radio Manual*, Open Society Foundation.

Indigenous Community Media in Latin America

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Article 16

"1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-Indigenous media without discrimination.

2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that State-owned media duly reflect Indigenous cultural diversity. States, without prejudice to ensuring full freedom of expression, should encourage privately owned media to adequately reflect Indigenous cultural diversity."

UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – 2007

The Right to Communication as Key to the Right to Self-determination

Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2007, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes their right to self-determination, that is to say, the right to freely seek their own path of development, conceived and defined on their own terms. There is a specific article in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples to create their own media, which illustrates the important role media plays in protecting the rights of Indigenous peoples and enabling them to defend themselves as minorities.

In Latin America, a widespread movement of 'indigenising' the media began in the 1960s. By appropriating communication technologies, Indigenous people have



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Workshop in audiovisual communication for Indigenious Mapuche and Mayan Women, in Guatemala in 2010.

set up community media which meet their specific needs. These include voicing their political claims (land-related, religious, etc.) to as many people as possible, learning about each other's challenges, sharing experiences and advice on possible solutions to common problems, and just existing in the media landscape – expressing their own culture and point of view, preserving collective memory and transmitting traditions, while opening the way to intercultural dialogue and the discovery of others. Ultimately, these efforts were explicitly aimed at achieving a form of 'decolonization of information', through a 'reversal of the gaze'.

Invisible Peoples

To this day, Indigenous peoples in Latin America still remain largely invisible in the mainstream media. It would be easy to explain this fact by their relatively small share of the population, which makes them of little interest for media conglomerates who focus on attracting large audiences. But this is not always the case (in Bolivia, 70% of the population is Indigenous), and the causes for this marginalization are rather due to the historical process of 'invisibilising' Indigenous peoples. National films produced in Latin American countries have contributed to this process. According to Angelica Mora Mateus, this invisibility is a 'failure of perception' generated by the colonial system. There is a long "post-colonial tradition which creates exclusion, condemns the Indian world to insignificance, and transforms the Indian into an invisible being."[1] Cinema has long been the privilege of an elite, and it has always conveyed the values of this elite. This is true even of movies where the main characters are Indigenous, because "there are ways to portray someone which actually makes them invisible."[2]

What Elif Karakartal says about Peru is true of many South American countries, where the wider population aspires to "*a recognition based on criteria and values*

[1] Mateus Mota Angelica (2012). *Cinéma et audiovisuel latino-américains, L'Indien : images et conflits*, L'Harmattan, p.12.
[2] Ibid.

originated elsewhere (...), as a result of the images imposed by a nation which has adopted the dominant model of the criollo world (person of mixed Spanish descent who expresses contempt of the Andean world), inherited from colonization. This representation system freezes what is foreign as 'good in itself', which in turn creates a sense of devaluation of the Indigenous world."[3] Miquel Angel has shown much the same in his study of the representation of Native Americans in Mexican cinema, which reveals the indifference and contempt with which the upper classes (which have produced the majority of Mexican filmmakers) treated Indigenous nations. Indian characters, even pre-Hispanic, are highly Europeanized. The 'true' history of Mexico, according to national cinema, begins only after the Spanish conquest – which is not often represented either.[4] This ideology has gradually been absorbed by the whole population, given the ubiquity of such discriminatory images and their sidelining of everything Indian. "Discrimination is integrated into the consensus of a post-colonial society which creates a sense of shame in individuals and a denial of a part of themselves – the Indigenous part, the vanquished part."[5]

Community radio: the first steps to 'Indigenising' the media

Mass media is at the service of power, and rarely takes into account peoples' needs in terms of information. In Mexico, for example, legislation governing radio and television does not allow any other type of communication than that imposed and controlled by the private sector. Very early on, the Mexican state delegated the media to the private sector – which did not prevent government from using rural radio as an important tool in the Indigenist project, which guided national policy up until the 1980s and which aimed at integrating Indigenous people into mainstream society by 'de-indianising' them. As a result, broadcasting in Mexico is the quasi monopoly of the television channel Televisa. The suppression of any media representing the marginalized sectors of Mexican society reinforces racism and perpetuates exclusion.[6]

Lack of access to mass media led to the creation of numerous alternative radio stations all over Latin America. This has not been an easy process, and the history of community and Indigenous radio is still a constant struggle for economic survival and official recognition. In Mexico, the government body responsible for telecommunications, COFETEL, has long denied community stations operation permits, dismissing them with various random excuses. Although some stations have a long history in the country (some date back more than thirty years), most of them were not recognized by the Mexican state until very recently, in the early years of 2000. And this recognition still does not provide them with protection

[3] Karakartal Elif (2006). "Réinventer un cinéma comme espace de libération et de réappropriation de soi. Récit de l'expérience de l'atelier Tokapu à Villa El Salvador, Pérou", in *Cinémas d'Amérique latine n°14*, Toulouse, p.5.

[4] Miquel Angel (2012). (, *Les représentations du monde pré-hispanique dans le cinéma mexicain*, Conference at the Quai Branly Museum, Paris, October 9th, 2009.

[5] Karakartal Elif, *Ibid*, p.5.

[6] See Gonzalez Castillo Eduardo (2012). "Radio communautaire et espace dans le Mexique néolibéral", *Communication*, vol. 30/2, http://communication.revues.org/3584.

against lawsuits, or against police violently breaking into their offices, on the pretext of 'criminal activities'.[7]

Community Video Workshops: spaces for learning and for collectively reclaiming the Indigenous imagination

From the eighties onwards, video technology enabled Indigenous peoples to take the media into their own hands. Until then only 'filmed objects', they became 'filming subjects', masters of their own image. According to Juan Jose Garcia, video technology came naturally to them because it is characterized 'by the use of image and sound, which is also characteristic of [Indigenous cultures]', where traditionally knowledge is transmitted through oral communication.[8] Today, there are many Indigenous audiovisual training organisations throughout Latin America, so many that they are impossible to list here[9]. Suffice it to say that the pioneers who spurred this dynamic at national and inter-American level are still very active to this day.

In Mexico, the initiative came from government, with the INI (National Indigenist Institute) and its training program "Transferring means of communication", which led in 1994 to the creation of the CVIs (Indigenous Video Centres). These in turn led to the emergence of autonomous structures such as Ojo de Agua Comunicación. Other independent organisations have also been created, such as Promedios, set up in 1997 following a series of meetings between American and Mexican video professionals and Indigenous leaders in Chiapas linked to the Zapatista insurrection movement. Today, Indigenous audiovisual production in Mexico is very active and its distribution is the widest in all Latin America.

In Brazil, the photographer and documentary film director Vincent Carelli initiated the "Video Nas Aldeias" workshops within the Nambikwara community in 1987. Twenty-seven years later, VNA has produced more than one hundred films, some of which constitute precious audiovisual archives for communities. In Bolivia, CEFREC (Centre for Training and Filmmaking) was created in 1989. In 1996, CEFREC launched, jointly with CAIB (Indigenous Audiovisual Coordination of Bolivia), newly founded by the main trade union and Indigenous confederations in the country, a "National plan for audiovisual communication" aiming to strengthen Indigenous self-representation in more than 100 communities. The resulting works include docu-dramas, documentary films, 'video letters' and the first series of 'Indigenous fictions' produced in Latin America.

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[7] Gonzalez Castillo Eduardo (2012), *Ibid*, pp.8-9. On Community Radio in Mexico, see also Chavez Pacheco Ulises and Guzman Cuevas Victor (2012), *La Palabra del Agua, l'aventure d'une radio libre dans les montagnes du Guerrero*, Editions A l'ombre du Maguay.

[8] Jose Garcia Juan (2006). "Video, comunidad y vida", in *Cinémas d'Amérique latine n°14,* Toulouse, p.23.

[9] See Pena Alquimia et Gumucio Dagron Alfonso (2012) (coord.). *Estudio de experiencias del cine y el audiovisual comunitario de América Latina y el Caribe*, Fundacion del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano.



© Zhigoneshi

The Zhigoneshi collective being its Arhuaco, Wiwa and Kogui members together.

While many of the professionals who initiated these community video workshops were not Indigenous, they did meet a real need of Indigenous peoples, as illustrated by Amado Villafaña, an Arhuaco who is a member of Zhigoneshi, a group of Indigenous communicators in Colombia: "If we as Indigenous people do not make movies, there are many people close to our communities who do, who speak for us. Even if they have good intentions, their representations are not faithful to our conception of our land and our way of thinking."[10] Video is thus a way to interpret their own identity and express who Indigenous peoples want to be.[11]

With Indigenous movies, young Indigenous people can communicate in their own language, and the preconception that this language is useless gradually loses conviction, despite the fact that up until recently, "children were punished in school for speaking their own language, and forced to learn Spanish. And still today, the objective of mass media and State politics is to eliminate the identity of Indigenous peoples."[12] Being able to use their own language enables Indigenous people to transmit and strengthen their culture, since each language is the reflection of a worldview, a representation of reality using specific, and sometimes unique categories. In this sense, community media is part of a collective resistance. And the distribution of films in Indigenous languages in Indigenous schools contributes to achieving these communities' right to education, on the

[10] Villafana Amado (2013). "A travers le dialogue et l'image, nous réclamons la reconnaissance", in *C@mérindien n°13*, Editions De la Plume à l'Ecran, p.12.
[11] Gilberto Carlos and Monteforte Guillermo (2006), "El cine y video en los pueblos indigenas, acciones y reflexiones", in *Cinémas d'Amérique latine n°14*, Toulouse, 2006, p.32.
[12] Chavez Pacheco Ulises and Guzman Cuevas Victor, Ibid, p.42.

basis of a differentiated program. It also helps to ensure national schools confront Indigenous realities, which is essential to deconstructing existing prejudices in mainstream society.

Video, a weapon of massive and collective communication

Information is power. Therefore its redistribution is central to attaining a just and democratic society. Violations of human rights and environmental destruction are now publicised by the communities themselves. They are no longer dependent on mainstream media to tell their story. Mal de Ojo TV, an initiative which emerged out of the popular uprising in Oaxaca in 2006, is an excellent illustration of this. It is an independent communication collective whose aim was to tell people, without self-censorship, about the reality of local social movements:

"Among our earliest recordings, there were police attacks, hundreds of thousands of angry, indignant people taking action, protesting massively and energetically. We also gave a voice to those who were injured, tortured and beaten and have shown how the government deceitfully manipulated and controlled the official media. We've posted all this material online: videos, audio stories, photos and written documents. (...) So all these people in the world could learn the truth about the conflict in Oaxaca. To our surprise, we realized that street vendors of 'pirated' movies were selling hundreds and even thousands of copies of our material. The people of Oaxaca gathered around the stalls in the street to see on television the images they could not see elsewhere. One newspaper went so far as to say that the videos of the independent media were selling like hotcakes."[13]

Any event in a given area is not only brought to the attention of the world but is also sent to other places where it can be used. Communities, which may be very distant from each other, can communicate more easily and discuss their strategies. Juan Jose Garcia, Zapotec and former president of Ojo de Agua, explains that the Zapatista movement has been a turning point in this regard: "It was exciting for us, helping us to see video as a weapon with which to confront ideological colonisation, and it gave us the chance to reflect on the value of our traditions, encouraging us to focus on different ways of fighting, to denounce the constant discrimination and marginalization inflicted on Indigenous peoples, to highlight the specific way we work, and to rethink development from the perspective of the lives and vision of the people of Mexico."[14] Video, then a revolutionary media, was part of the process of changing the world.

Of course, in most cases, Western audiovisual patterns are still evident in the form and storytelling of these productions. But Indigenous videos are equally impor-

[13] Mal De Ojo (10/12/2006), *Les médias indépendants dans la lutte populaire de Oaxaca,* published on the Promedios France website http://promediafrancefree.fr

[14] Jose Garcia Juan, Ibid, p.27.

tant in terms of the political message they convey and the way in which they are directed, which is deeply collective. "It is not the desire to conquer power that motivates them, but a necessity that comes from within: creating social relationships through which they develop their own ability to change the world."[15] Through a collective process of assessing their own needs, they select themes which reflect community priorities. The production methodology allows everyone involved to experiment with different roles (cameraman, sound, etc.) and participants are not 'directors', but video 'coordinators' or 'sponsors' for the group. It is often people with a strong activist background who get involved in video because they see it as creating a space for change. Community video, as an instrument of action, is a tool to assert the vital strength of the community. Much of the contents are "knowledge acquired and protected over time and passed on from generation to generation through mechanisms that are our own. What characterizes Indigenous productions is their specific gaze and participatory working methods, an intimate approach to the concerns and feelings of the members of the community."[16]

If "*the purpose of Sarayaku cinema is the community, its struggle, and the preservation of its culture and its lands*," as stated by Alejandro Santillan, an audiovisual instructor in the Sarayaku community of Ecuador[17], the creative power of the author is not denied either. He sees himself not only as an individual but as a representative of his community. This is what Amado Villafaña characterizes as the responsibility of the director: "Audiovisual creation is not a hobby or an artistic feeling, but a great responsibility. (...) [The image] is a tool, like a shovel or a machete, to be used to nurture the land and sustain our families. The camera should also be used to protect our collective property, our territory, our images, our thinking. (...) Everything that came before that was just looting. People waltzed in to Indigenous communities and took pictures and made films. But we are also able to work together."[18]

Conclusion

Indigenous peoples' freedom of expression and the right to communication are closely interconnected in the field of human rights. The achievements of this movement fostering Indigenous expression and communication through community video are extensive. It not only challenged the very simplistic image conveyed by the mainstream media, but the films created also inspired the development of a network for sharing experience and knowledge. Such were the objectives behind the creation of CLACPI (Latin American Coordination of Indigenous Peoples Communication) in 1985 in Mexico. CLACPI organises an Indigenous cinema and video festival every year in a different South American country, which nurtures mutual knowledge and skill-sharing, and runs conferences on the right to com-

[15] Chavez Pacheco Ulises and Guzman Cuevas Victor, Ibid, p.20.
[16] Jose Garcia Juan, *Ibid*, p.25.
[17] Pena Alquimia and Gumucio Dagron Alfonso (eds.), Ibid, p.18.
[18] Villafana Amado, Ibid, p.14.

munication[19]. In August 2014 in Montreal, the same desire to strengthen collective processes of video creation and diffusion brought together several audiovisual organisations including Wapikoni Mobile (Quebec), Video Nas Aldeias (Brazil), CLACPI, CEFREC (Bolivia) and De la Plume à l'Ecran (France) to lay the foundations of an international network of Indigenous audiovisual creation (RICAA).

This opens up a brand new perspective which consists of inventing a different way to relate to dominant society. Because film is language and, above all, dialogue: "A film does not end with editing. What gives a film its life is what happens when it meets its public. (...) Everywhere films inspire new discussions, and these discussions inspire new ideas. (...) This is what happens when a group draws on a film and uses it to build a meaningful dialogue with society. Film is a language of action."[20] Through this dialogical creation, Indigenous peoples demand recognition, and the right to become what Juan Jose Garcia calls "worthy interlocutors of the times to come."[21]

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"Our Cameras are Weapons, our Reports Bullets"

JEAN-BAPTISTE MOUTTET
Independent journalist and contributor to the news site Basta!

"Don't watch television, make it!" says a poster in the Catia TVe studios, a Venezuelan TV channel. At first, the studios don't look that different from those of a mainstream channel: there's a recording room, a newsroom and administrative offices... Although the drawing on the wall of a guerrilla holding a megaphone starts one wondering.

CatiaTVe, located in the eponymous Caracas area in Venezuela, is a community media[1]. And it's not just giving a voice to the people who live here: the residents of 'barrios', Venezuelan favelas, are behind its creation and in charge of running it. "Communities produce 70% of our programmes and radio employees the other 30%", explains Ligia Elena, information coordinator. The twenty-eight employees, who are all paid the same minimum salary (about 254 euros), are themselves from disadvantaged areas.

"No private wealth! No State!"

"The aim of private media is to sell. Ours is to enable people to express themselves", says Ligia Elena. "They condemn our barrios and all they talk about is insecurity. But we're putting our struggles out there". Wilfredo Vasquez, one of its founders, maintains that CatiaTVe is contributing to "socio-cultural change": "Our cameras are weapons, our reports bullets", he adds resolutely.

Catia TVe, founded in 2001, is one of the biggest community media outlets in Venezuela. Others, like Radio Activa, founded in 1997, are generally smaller. Radio Activa, which has a libertarian streak to it, belongs entirely to the La Vega community, another disadvantaged neighbourhood in Caracas, and is funded

[1] http://medioscomunitarios.org/wp/wordpress



© Jorge Sanz

Locaux de Catia TVe .

through donations. "A neighbour gave us this table, the microphones come from a friend", Francisco Pérez, one of the radio's founders, tells us, pointing out objects on a roof overlooking the barrio's small ochre houses. One of the participants, Ayari Pérez, criticises both private and State-owned media for which "everything is always ultra positive". Words that resound against the radio station's slogan as uttered by Francisco: "No private wealth! No State!"

Radio Activa has no paid workers. All La Vega residents are free to sign up and go on air with whatever subject interests them. The only restriction Francisco and his team have imposed is that programmes should be no longer than one hour, as it was not uncommon for shows to run on for several hours. The programmes pertain to the neighbourhood and are diverse in content: local news, music, politics, sport, among others. The revolutionary spirit is alive and well in a horizontal organisation. Catia TVe is like a foundation in its non-hierarchical approach. Its members elect its managers and certain decisions are made at assemblies.

Take charge and increase community media

Some community media offer free training to barrios residents. "We teach them to look at media from a different perspective, how to write a script, how to use a camera, how to edit a video," explains training manager Iris Castillo. Each learning group can then broadcast its productions. Catia TVe also broadcasts national news, independent films and documentaries. Like Radio Activa, the team at Catia TVe don't know who their audience is: "We are broadcast pretty much all over Caracas and the neighbouring areas", explains Ligia Elena.

Nationally there are 280 radio and television stations[2] like Catia TVe and Radio Activa, authorized by National Telecommunications (Conatel)[3]. But the actual figure is almost certainly below this, as some stations are not accredited. But protected by a benevolent State, this sector continues to grow. The 244 radio stations dominate the alternative media landscape. "Televisual equipment is much more costly and requires a lot more space," notes Andres Cañizalez, professor and researcher in communication. And "community websites" are rare: "The Internet is still a media for the middle-class. Computers are not a widespread phenomenon in the barrios and Internet access is not always reliable".

A new legal framework

A bill[4] on "communication to empower the grassroots community" is currently underway at the National Assembly. It could trigger a new lease on life. It aims to give community media legal status so it can receive financial support. Radio space is to be divided three ways between State radio, "community" radio and private radio.

For Wilfredo Vàsquez, the bill is a breakthrough as it "means long-term sustainability". Setting up a fund will, according to the bill "provide for maintenance costs, investment, training and content production". Private media stations will also have to give 2 % of their profits to "grassroots communication".

Ligia Elena is counting on this new resource to repair cameras and buy new equipment. Yet Francisco knows his radio station won't get anything. As stipulated by the bill, media stations have to be registered with Conatel: "They always find some excuse to refuse to approve us. Someone would have already taken our frequency … and it's not even true!" he says, alluding to the hypothesis that Hugo Chavez's government has a negative perception of his neighbourhood. Is this a shift towards a decline in independence?

The project has received criticism. The NGO Espacio público[5], which advocates freedom of expression, considers that the law is going against freedom of expression and doesn't respect the principle of non-discrimination. Article 1 stipulates that media is based on an anti-hegemonic, anti-imperialist and anti-oligarchic model and that "sovereignty" and "national identity" are promoted.

According to professor Andres Cañizalez, there is no doubt whatsoever that "with this law, the government is seeking to bring community media under State control". The special fund will depend on whoever's sitting in the vice-president's

[2] www.conatel.gob.ve
[3] www.conatel.gob.ve
[4] http://static.eluniversal.com
[5] http://espaciopublico.org

seat and not on an independent body. But Catia TVe dismisses this argument: "We broadcast advertising and yet we have retained our autonomy. The law won't affect our independence", maintains production coordinator José Luis.

Catia TVe is maintained by donations from the community, advertising on behalf of companies and national institutions and by producing and selling advertisements. "If people ask us to work with them or screen advertisements that don't fit with our ideas, we won't do it", adds José Luis. Ligia Elena can point to ten computers financed by government support.

In a country where politics is deeply entrenched in whether you're pro-Chávez or anti-Chávez, it's not easy to escape being landed on one side or another. And community radio is not exempt from this rule. It is also vouching for democracy, as reflected by stations like Catia TVe which, when the coup d'État[6] against Hugo Chávez occurred in April 2002, succeeded in taking control of the public station VTV and broadcast programmes as a way to thwart conspirator information.

[6] www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2002/05/LEMOINE/8838

Mobilisation 2.0:
Challenges for Collective Action Through the Web

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For a long time, it was thought that activism was the result of pathology or social disorganisation (Diani, 2011: 223). This interpretation of reality did not survive the 1960s: already back then, it became clear to theorists of collective action that activism is generally immersed in a "rich texture of social relations"(idem). Networks guarantee participation and inhibit disaggregation, particularly in mobilisations involving risk and requiring a high level of commitment and trust, as seen with the civil rights movement in the United States.

As stated by Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson, in 1980, "Individuals who join social movements share the kind of demographic and social characteristics that allow them to follow their interests and/or engage in exploratory behaviour to a greater extent than individuals who are bound to existing lines of action by such extraneous commitments as spouse, children, debts, jobs and professional reputation"(1980: 794).

Diani takes this further, describing network action as a result of a crisis in the legitimacy of political parties and other forms of representation. "Networks are also being considered as a desirable, more legitimate, and democratic form of political organization" (idem: 226) – although this is also subject to the robustness of these networks and the bond between its members, as pointed out by the author.

The recent surge in Internet access[1] pushed this premise to its limit. Although people recognise that the digital divide persists, mainly in Africa and Asia[2], one

[1] In Latin America alone, Internet access increased by 1310.8% between 2000 and 2012.
[2] In Africa, 15.6% of the population has Internet access and in Asia, 26.5%.



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cannot deny the role played by new social networks in organising, maintaining and disseminating collective action locally and globally, mainly for groups that have historically been side-lined from the mass media for financial reasons or due to time and space constraints (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011: 1207).

This article aims to explore the mechanisms that drive activist engagement through these digital networks, and to list some of the challenges faced by social movements, organisations and collectives working to turn digital engagement into reality.

The primacy of ownership

In order to understand the dynamics around digital networks, there needs to be an understanding of the subjects that make them up and the forces that influence their behaviour and relationships. There is a lot of literature on this topic.

According to Michel Maffesoli (1995: 05), after the experience of rationality, of bourgeois utilitarianism culminating in market capitalism, we have moved to a new stage where once again, the seeds of our tribalised culture are beginning to germinate: a culture concerned about excess, about the aestheticisation of the world and social relationships, a concern only experienced when shared with like-minded people. He states that "traditional ways of being and the accentuation of local customs and forms of communitarian solidarity" are concrete examples of this new stage for mankind (idem: 34).

He believes that by crystallising the collective genius of an era in every individual, micro communities are being built and these in turn represent the "saturation of the democratic ideal and the emergence, ambiguous in many respects, of what one may call the communitarian ideal" (idem: 9). Maffesoli goes on to explain that nowadays, this ideal is closely related to an organic solidarity. We are only part of a group when we share emotions and create emotional ties, even if our action is limited and lacks a specific purpose.

Post-modern theory can also be useful in attempting to explain the role of the subject who, in light of the disintegration of institutions and references, is more in search of belonging than freedom. They want to belong to something. They want to be portrayed as something. French theorist Alain Touraine explains how modernity has reduced the individual to their social role and how, based on this, they turn to the community and to self-representation in an attempt to explain and justify their own existence.

"(…) With the media, we cease to be social beings whose roles are defined by established social norms. (…) We are discovering that we are individuals whose morality is not related to any model, but to the preservation and enrichment of our individuality in the midst of a whirlwind of events and information."(Touraine, 1997: 47)

In both Maffesoli's and Touraine's work, the emphasis on the individual's role is clear – not in its liberalist interpretation, but as a fundamental player in intra-community relationships. It is the individual, disregarded in the project of globalisation, who discovers that returning to the local is a means of resistance – where they can keep their identity safe. Manuel Castells explains this *identity of resistance:*

"Generated by those actors in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society (…)."(Castells, 1996: 24)

According to the author, this kind of identity-building "leads to the formation of communes or communities". This definition can be used to explain different kinds of religious fundamentalism or nationalism, but it also allows us to analyse, from a broader perspective, the formation of movements focussed on social action, whether they be structural or targeted, local or global.

From the network to the streets

Although the Internet and certain social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter and even YouTube have been highlighted as influential factors in recent political



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Genoa July 2001.

mobilisations, the use of digital tools for recruiting and organising activists dates back to the end of the 1990s, with the World Trade Organisation meeting held in Seattle in 1999. There were more experiences of mobilisation and recruitment in January 2001, at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, and later at the G8 summit in Genoa. Again, there was network-based action the following year at the first European Social Forum in Florence.

Although the networks' role was, at the time, primarily conventional, largely limited to facilitating information flow (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011: 1208), interactive, open and collectively managed tools were already being used, particularly in social forums, for managing the contributions of the network's participants. This is the case of Ciranda, the first WSF platform, which brought together alternative international media, columnists, activists and students. In 2008, this platform expanded with the creation of the first WSF social network, wsf2008.net, created for exchanging independently-produced content all over the world throughout the meeting. The following year, this platform was replaced by the network OpenFSM.

Despite the new flexibility and non-hierarchical aspect that the network gave to social action, these initiatives still reflected relatively strong ties between the members of the global justice movement and a certain homogeneity in their agendas, interests and ways of acting.

Digital social networks later adopted a role where they represented more aggregators than articulators, reaching a greater number of people and making it possible to react quickly to situations, but failing to create more sustainable

movements. As described by Juris (2012: 267), more than "mobilizing networks of networks, the use of Twitter and Facebook in social movements tends to generate crowds of individuals".

This is not necessarily a negative thing, depending on the kind of action and objectives desired. A good example was social networks' response to disasters, like the earthquake in Haiti in 2010. Here the ability of quick and targeted engagement, on a global scale, was put to the test. In addition to tools which facilitated donations, systems like Ushaidi (an application systematising and classifying events using geo-localisation), helped identify critical locations, rank needs and distribute help efficiently. In just 48 hours, the Red Cross received US$ 8 million in donations (Gao and Barbier, 2011: 10).

It is important to remember that the flow of information coming out of Haiti was far greater than the flow within the country's borders, due to the lack of local and community communication tools. At the time, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters detected only twelve community radio stations in the disaster-hit area.

The ability to rally together gave social movements a new task at the end of the decade: how to create collective subjectivity through networks, which went beyond a kind of one-off mobilisation, localized in time and space, while avoiding the constant risk of disaggregation. The answer came in the form of an occupation, first in Tunisia and Egypt, and then with more diverse occupation movements, including the "indignados" movement in Spain and Occupy Wall Street in the United States (Juris, 2012: 266).

"The question that now arises is whether the increasing use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter has led to new patterns of protest that shape movement dynamics beyond the realm of technological practice and to what extent these are similar to or different from the networking logics characteristic of global justice activism (idem: 260).

This crucial issue was brought to light during the so-called Arab Spring. Without overlooking the fact that it was internal factors and mobilisations from previous years (for example, the strike by textile workers in Mahalla in 2008, and the revolt of miners in Gafsa, Tunisia the same year) and not the new social networks which laid the foundations for the movement in both Tunisia and Egypt, it is important to recognise the impact of these networks in connecting the real world. As explained by Eltantawy and Wiest (2011: 1213), these platforms introduced the speed and interactivity that were lacking in traditional mobilisation techniques and allowed activists inside and outside the country to keep up with what was happening, join groups and engage in discussions.

Although it played a major role, social media was clearly not the only or main driver of the revolution. This became obvious when government efforts to promote a digital blackout failed to hamper protests in the street – but rather did quite the opposite. It appears that it is here, in this interconnection between the strong ties of human networks and the unrivalled aggregational ability of digital social networks, with their fragile yet easily activated ties, where lies the most promising opportunities for the future of mobilisation 2.0.

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Nawaat, a Website Reinventing Journalism in the Arab World

AGNÈS ROUSSEAUX
Journalist at the news site Basta!

Tunisians may be rediscovering press freedom, but journalism, as a profession, still needs to be reinvented after half a century of authoritarian rule. The news website Nawaat has become a benchmark for investigative journalism in Tunisia and beyond. Acting as catalysts for a democracy in construction, professional journalists, bloggers and lay contributors provide their readers with a wealth of scoops and insights. And now Nawaat seeks to branch out and reach working-class neighbourhoods and people disconnected from the Web.

"The lack of serious journalistic work led us to focus on news. Less opinion and more facts," says Malek Khadhraoui, editor of Tunisian independent media Nawaat.org. Nawaat, which began as an activist platform and turned into a collective blog in 2006, has become a reference in Tunisia. Bypassing censorship, it widely publicised the beginnings of the revolt in 2008, and then published the WikiLeaks cables. "People discovered Nawaat during the Revolution. Our videos were reposted by foreign media such as Al Jazeera. The day Ben Ali lifted Internet censorship, January 13, 2011, our website had more than a million hits!"

Nawaat has been trying to introduce a new genre in Tunisia: investigative journalism. "Investigative journalism raises many questions in our country: is it intelligence gathering? How is the information obtained?" Malek explains. The website has offered the most comprehensive coverage of the 'martyrs of the Revolution' trial, including extensive investigative work "to raise the public's awareness of what a parody this military tribunal is." With 50 to 100,000 visitors



© Scossar Gilbert

Protest in Tunisia.

per day, the website's success continues unabated in a country where few media are so outspoken. Nawaat focuses on news which is not covered by traditional media. "We avoid soundbite news and sensationalism", says Malek. "And we're filming almost every civil society conference, to keep that memory".

Tools for democratic transition

Facing the Tunis Tribunal, near the Kasbah, there is a small door with a camera. Behind this door is the Nawaat headquarters (the "core"), where the blog became progressively institutionalised after the Revolution. The founders of the website – bankers and lawyers – returned from exile, and a formal organisation was set up, which then recruited journalists. An editorial committee oversees the website, which publishes five to ten articles a day, written by journalists, regular columnists (economists, lawyers, researchers) and 350 "citizen contributors".

New projects are underway, such as writing workshops to encourage the development of local media across the country. Nawaat is currently working on introducing editorial activities into Youth Centres, and has developed a platform for local media, Jaridaty.net ("My Newspaper"). Nawaat also produces documentaries and seeks to develop tools to promote democracy, such as a hackerspace (a meeting place for web developers). Eleven people currently work for Nawaat, with financial support from the US-based Open Society Foundation. Nawaat has given itself two years to find a business model that will allow it to be self-financed.

Threats and lawsuits

"But our main activity is lobbying", says Malek. The organisation has launched an urban poster campaign across Tunisia on freedom of expression. Because although freedom of expression "is here", censorship persists in the courts.The authors of a song entitled "The police are Dogs" were sentenced to two years in prison along with two other rappers mentioned in the credits of the video clip. Nawaat itself has been the object of several lawsuits. "We are asked to reveal our sources, which we refuse to do. But the judicial authorities are not very aggressive at the moment. And the lawsuits are pretty pathetic, so we run no real economic risk at this stage", Malek says. Still, Nawaat is under constant threat. Journalists sometimes need to be placed under police protection.

In its fight for democracy, Nawaat has also lodged an official complaint against the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) because of the lack of transparency in the development of the Constitution. "Elected officials are absent from the debates and there is no transparency. The ANC has received eight million euros from the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) to encourage transparency and citizen participation. We even offered to provide free technical support to promote transparency". But nothing worked.

A political and media battle

"We are disappointed with the debates in the Constituent Assembly: Sharia or no Sharia, normalisation of relations with Israel... These are not the main concerns of the Tunisian people," says Malek. "Civil society pushes us toward an ideal, yet we have a completely archaic political class, which is struggling to understand the very structure of society. They focus on Islam, and both the traditional right and left are both out of touch. There are young people involved in political parties, but it will take time before they can access senior positions".

So as to reach a wider audience than its current young readership, Nawaat will publish a weekly newspaper and an investigative magazine over the coming weeks. "No one over forty knows anything about us. Nor does anyone living in the working-class suburbs of Tunis. They are the ones who vote for Ennahda", says Malek. In the media battle, a race against time has begun. "We have helped to create other independent media, trained people, set the ball rolling. But the Islamic party has also created its own media, with funds from the Gulf States". A political battle is currently being played out in the media, and Nawaat intends to join in.

03

ICTS THAT ARE REVOLUTIONISING THE WAY WE WORK: CREATIVE PROPOSALS AND ALTERNATIVES

Citizens should not see the Internet, the Web and the pipes through which information, content and discussions travel as some obscure, unknowable world. The danger lies in the fact that only a handful of companies, software manufacturers, service providers and ingenious technicians rule this universe. Should 'technological sovereignty' be abandoned to an oligopoly? Over the last few years, advocates of free software, hackers and computer engineers, inspired by the importance of sharing information and freedom of expression, have been working with social movements and organisations to democratise their knowledge. Being able to get a hold on these new technologies and have at least a basic understanding of how they work, being able to design, create and share software, networks and alternative ways of accessing the Internet, without being dependent on the sector's heavyweights is indispensable in the information age. Freedom of expression, the right to communication, the right to freely access information, the emergence of new independent media and all that contributes to rejuvenating democracy depends on it.

For an Ecology of Networks

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The eco-protocol debate and overcoming monoculture on the Internet

The word "network" is increasingly common in modern vocabulary. It has gone from being a simple object, to referring to political and communication dynamics. Just as social movements are organised through networks and defy the political structures consolidated throughout the 20th Century, digital networks encourage breaking the transmitter-receiver boundary, the exchange of information, mixing formats and (re)mixing content.

These two aspects of the word "network" are intertwined in different multitudinous movements which have taken to the streets in different parts of the world in the last few years. But what is it that movements from places as different as Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Spain, Portugal, the United States, Mexico, Chile and Brazil, amongst many others, have in common? One of their most obvious characteristics is the emergence of cross-cutting political activism, led by young people who occupy public spaces and make use of digital technologies to connect to each other in networks, so as to expand on their action in the streets and question current institutional political structures. Its dynamics in digital networks is closely linked to actions on the street – without there being a causal relationship in which one precedes the other: the digital environment and the material are not separate but rather constitute each other and make up the same reality.



© Ahmad Hammoud

Cairo, Egypt. February 2011.

Popular uprisings in the north of Africa, which began in 2010, were often referred to as the "Twitter Revolution" or "Facebook Revolution". Despite being a constituent part of these political processes, interaction on digital platforms, particularly these specific digital social networks, is not what defines them. As Martin-Barbero cautions in his classic work, From Means to Mediations (pp18-19), "mistaking communication for the techniques, for the means, is just as warped as thinking that they are external and accessories of (true) communication". Mistaking the dynamics of popular movements for the communication tools they use is even more distorted – but the fact that these digital platforms stand out in these processes needs to be taken into consideration, including when the objective is to overcome their hegemony.

The paradox of counter-hegemonic communication on hegemonic platforms

Despite platforms such as Twitter and Facebook giving users a sense of freedom and independence, they are private enterprises aiming to make profits – and without legislation protecting our rights online, we are exposed to abuse. As has been said so many times, "when the service is free, be careful: you are the product". In this case, it is our data which are at stake. Data is sold to companies who target their advertising based on the inclinations their potential customers have shown on the Internet, ranging from a Facebook post, to a sent email or a search on Google. In extreme cases, such vulnerability can endanger the sovereignty of entire nations – as states Edward Snowden, a former technician

at the National Security Agency of the United States (NSA), who revealed a global surveillance scheme implemented by the government of his country with the connivance of these corporations.

Another obstacle we come across when using proprietary networks is that our freedom is restricted – it goes comes to an end when companies, corporations and even citizens feel disturbed.

It is common to see cases where Facebook users have their content censored or are banned from using their account for a certain amount of time. In order to avoid being held responsible for channelling certain content, the company punishes its users without checking whether the complaint is legal. A kind of censorship is established, where private initiative plays the role of a judge and jury. And there have been many cases of activists whose content has been arbitrarily removed from proprietary networks.

Therefore, when we speak about socially engaged communication, aiming to contribute to the radicalisation of democracy, it becomes contradictory that we should settle for proprietary networks. Why then do so many activists continue to use them? Some of the possible reasons include: a belief that, even while building open alternatives, one must communicate with the vast number of people who use proprietary networks, so as to break activist circles; a lack of knowledge about open initiatives on the Internet and even about the contradiction of using proprietary platforms; and the limited scope of or difficulty in using open tools.

In fact, there are already many open networks (such as Noosfero[1], Cirandas[2], Rede Livre[3], Rede Mocambos[4], International Ciranda of Shared Communication, Soylocoporti[5], CulturaDigital.br[6], N-1[7] and Diaspora[8], which is, out of these, the one whose format is most similar to Facebook). But how can they contribute more incisively so that emancipated communication blossoms on the Internet? Can they effectively counter proprietary platforms? How can we broaden this debate and increase the number of followers on this journey, both amongst social movements themselves and beyond them?

[1] http://noosfero.org
[2] http://cirandas.net
[3] http://redelivre.org.br
[4] http://wiki.mocambos.net
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Eco-protocols: from digital monoculture to an ecology of knowledge

Every dialogue that takes place between people, whether mediated by machines or not, depends on having a common language between transmitter and receiver, through which the message will be conveyed. In order for different messages to travel through communication networks, the machines carrying out the information exchange must share common protocols, allowing a sent message to be understood by the end receiving it.

The Internet as we know it today, works like an onion: one protocol supports another protocol which supports another, which can then support other protocols. The network's versatility allows it to expand based on its existing infrastructure, thus creating an infinite number of other structures. The main protocol governing the Internet's infrastructure today is the IP (Internet Protocol). A series of other protocols were created on top of it to set standards for information exchanges, such as HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol), which sets the standard for how hypertext content (which makes up webpages) is exchanged, and RSS (Rich Site Summary), which allows content published on one website to be instantly reproduced on another through a shared content agreement between the two. In other words, the agreement (protocol) is essentially a question of adopting the same language.

With the growth of social networks as a day-to-day form of communication, new protocols have emerged for exchanging messages and publications on personal pages on social networks. The big problem is that many of these protocols were created (and are managed) by companies who exploit their users' social relationships to monetise them and profit from this, thus turning users into the real products. On the other hand, hacktivists and movements linked to software freedom are developing protocols and applications, to offer alternatives in this scenario, increasingly dominated by major corporations.

Thanks to this resistance, various alternatives are being created and used by groups fighting for sovereignty, privacy and freedom. However, diversity also promotes fragmentation, leading to some of these tools isolating themselves amongst themselves – and, sometimes, one person's technology is incompatible with someone else's. This is why, in making efforts to break these barriers by integrating and agreeing on common protocols, relationships between these movements are strengthening, whilst the power of hegemonizing instruments is weakening.

In order to guarantee competitive advantages and ensure there are barriers for new competitors, major information companies convince thousands of people to use their protocols, offering their free technology as the great advantage of using it. On the one hand, following this path makes it easier for more sectors of



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Berlin.

society to be technologically integrated; on the other, it establishes a monoculture of knowledge, concentrated in the hands of the company carrying out the research and developing the technology. This is also how Monsanto operates: it offers sterile seeds and chemical fertilizers at very low prices – a process that creates large-scale monoculture plantations, leads to the soil and water degradation and creates user dependence, because any reversal of this process, any attempt to abandon this technology, which was so easy to adopt, turns out to be costly and difficult.

If we were to continue with this vision of creating a single protocol, even if with different social values, we would be imposing an exclusive way of integrating networks, thus rejecting alternatives. Based on a logic of digital monoculture, the activist alternative would be to create an open platform which competes for the audience with a hegemonic platform. However, in addition to the difficulty of convincing all collectives and movements to use a single platform, this dispute would take place in a relationship of unequal power. That is why it has been suggested that efforts to integrate counter-hegemonic information networks should go back to the original spirit of the Internet – decentralisation and diversity.

The principle of ecology is quite interesting for making this discussion operational. In an ecology, we recognize that every part is eternally incomplete and that players need to exchange something in order for them to be complete. In other words, no single part will ever be able to in itself be complete unless it shares its existence with other peers. Hence the concept of eco-protocols (protocols which complement each other in an ecology), similar to the proposal of

P2P (Peer to Peer) networks, which establishes an ecology of data where every point in the node has a part of the data.

In order for this discussion to become effective, we must follow two complementary and indissoluble paths: a technical discussion about the ways to make an ecology of protocols possible and a political discussion to convince movements of the topic's importance, as well as of the need to integrate in order to counter the world's information hegemonies.

The Internet as a strategic field for political struggles

Building a protocol ecology, that can sustain itself and flourish, based on whichever minimal conditions are given, will only begin when movements become aware of the fact that the struggle for digital sovereignty is embedded in other day-to-day struggles; that it is inseparable and strategic. In this sense, it is extremely important that the most diverse social movements become actively involved in the development of their own digital technologies and build an environment where they can speak to each other. And collectives and public policies on Digital Culture play a fundamental role as facilitators for involving other movements in confronting hegemony and building sovereignty.

The political challenge, which consists of integrating networks and encouraging organisations to break the chains with the digital instruments of monoculture is more difficult than the technical challenge.

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Building a Civil Rights Framework for the Internet in Brazil

DEBORAH MOREIRA

Free media journalist and activist since 2002, when she got involved in the World Social Forum through Ciranda Internacional da Comunicação Compartilhada (International Ciranda of Shared Communication). She is a member of Brazil's Marco Civil Já, the campaign advocating adopting a legal framework to protect civil rights on the Internet.

The movement to preserve Internet freedom in Brazil emerged in response to threats to control and criminalise Internet users. Building a bill in a collaborative and open way was instrumental in gaining society's support.

"The Internet was born at the unlikely intersection of big science, military research, and libertarian culture", as defined by the sociologist Manuel Castells[1]. Since its inception in 1969, the Internet has expanded to the point at which we know it today. Content, formats and technologies continue to emerge all the time. Free access gave rise to collaborative practices in cyberspace.

What makes this environment possible is neutrality, a concept that is new but easily understood when one considers the current dynamics of exchanging information in the virtual world: all packets of data are treated equally, without discrimination in traffic conditions. Another two important points are privacy and freedom of expression. The result of this combination breaks down barriers and gives rise to new sources of information, much to the vexation of political groups and corporations.

[1] Castells Manuel (2001). *La Galaxie Internet,* Paris: fayard.



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Conference in São Paulo, April 2014.

March 25th 2014 marked an important moment in the history of communication, when the Civil Rights Framework for the Internet was approved by the Chamber of Deputies in Brazil. This framework is a charter of principles based on the 1988 Federal Constitution of Brazil[2], which sets out user rights, access provider obligations and public authority duties, such as guaranteeing governance mechanisms that are transparent, collaborative and democratic, promoting citizenship, educational practices, culture and technological development.

The Brazilian law, approved by President Dilma Rousseff during the opening of the Net Mundial meeting on April 23rd, was considered a source of inspiration for discussing models of global Internet governance. But, how did such a robust movement, in support of the Internet, emerge in a country with a communications infrastructure deficit and where only 36% of the middle income class and 6% of the lower income class have Internet access at home[3]? And where only 7% of state schools have computers in class rooms?

In order to answer this question, one must understand where threats to the Internet come from.

Throughout the world, commercial groups and vigilantes have attempted to impose their control over cyberspace. Some bills of this nature have already emerged, such as the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and the Protect IP Act (PIPA), in the United

[2] Amongst other definitions, it guarantees that all persons are equal before the law.
[3] Study carried out by the Centre of Studies on Information and Communication Technologies (Cetic.br).

States, and the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), in the European Union. All of them were shelved following strong mobilisation by civil society.

In Brazil the Internet has been under attack since 2003, when a bill was presented by the then senator Eduardo Azeredo (from the PSDB), known as AI-5 Digital[4], which would make it compulsory to keep a record of user connections[5] for three years; a way of monitoring users which would force providers to denounce (confidentially) suspicions of criminal practices; and would oblige all Brazilian Internet users to register in order to access the Internet.

The threat led to different Internet advocacy groups to turn the debate around and question those responsible for jeopardising the free circulation of content on the Internet. Firstly, there are the telecommunications companies, such as private telephony network operators and Internet service and access providers. They want to destroy Internet neutrality so as to profit from controlling access to content – such as professional, film and music networks – which today only require a broadband connection – and offer them in differentiated service packages, as is already the case with cable television.

The copyright industry, mainly comprising film and music associations from the United States, such as the major Hollywood studios, also wants to be able to remove content from websites, without needing a court order. This practice was even included in the Brazilian Civil Rights Framework but was removed in later negotiations. Other groups against Internet freedom include police agencies and political vigilantes who want to restrict the right to privacy.

In the political struggle waged in the Brazilian Congress, lobbies linked to SinDiTeleBrasil (the telecommunications trade union) tried to obliterate Net neutrality, arguing that less privileged classes could benefit from cheap rates, which provide access only to emails and social networks for example. It soon became clear that, in practice, this would cause digital apartheid. However, companies are still lobbying so that ancillary laws, which will regulate the civil rights framework, allow for exceptions to be made on neutrality.

The progressive movement spread through society

Despite shortcomings in Internet infrastructure and access, the number of users in Brazil continues to grow at an ever-increasing pace. In 2012, the total number of Brazilians over the age of 10 who had already accessed the Internet (49%) was greater than the number who never been on-line (45%), according to a TIC Domicilios study from 2012, carried out by the Brazilian Internet Steering Committee (CGI.BR). 6%

[4] Alluding to Institutional Act n°5 of the Brazilian military dictatorship allowing the State to arrest people without a court order.

[5] IP (Internet Protocol) addresses which register the date and time a connection begins and ends.



© Daniel Sieradski

New York. January 2012.

had used the Internet more than three months ago. In figures, a study by Ibope, from the first quarter of 2013 concluded that the country already had 102.3 million users.

In order to understand why the movement in defence of the Internet is gaining strength in Brazil, one must bear in mind that it came together as a counter-offensive to a bill which had been debated by the Chamber of Deputies since 1999, and which required a prolonged resistance from society. In 2003, Azeredo presented a bill to replace the 1999 version. Following its approval in the Senate in 2008, the bill returned to the Chamber of Deputies, where Azeredo, elected a member of parliament in 2010, was once again made rapporteur of the bill in 2011.

The sociologist and cyber-activist Sérgio Amadeu da Silveira, professor at the Federal University of the ABC (UFABC), tells us that in 2008 "a teachers movement began, hoping to collect a thousand signatures" against the bill. But "it rained signatures", he recalls. Social networks were not yet that influential, and the petition was transferred to a website (PetitionOnline). In addition to Orkut and Twitter, blogs also played a role in getting more signatures, attracting groups which had not manifested themselves until then, such as Fanfiction communities (fans who write stories for television series and films) and Fansub communities (fans who add subtitles to films or television series, without the creator's consent). "The movement was not one of a segmented group. It was a wide-ranging and diverse partnership, with international support", states Amadeu da Silveira.

In 2009, the movement gained momentum with the coalition of many collectives and gave rise to the Movimento Mega Não Movement, which then set up a cam-

paign. "There was already an encouraging cultural environment because Brazil was redrafting its copyright law with innovative provisions. An article by the lawyer Ronaldo Lemos in 2007, which for the first time mentioned a Civil Rights Regulatory Framework for the Internet, had already "spurred an interest in the topic," Paulo Rená, founder of the Pirate Party of Brazil and Mega Não activist, recalls.

It was a time of collective blogging, when bloggers wrote about AI-5 Digital the same day, when emails, posts and photos were being shared and demonstrations were taking place all over Brasilia. "Unfortunately it wasn't enough to stop the bill being approved by the Senate (to then be sent back to the Chamber of Deputies). But the movement's repercussion was all over the news and people found out about the mobilisation, and more people got involved", he comments.

René is a civil servant, but activists' profiles are quite diverse: advertisers, journalists, lawyers, researchers, university professors, artists, film-makers, programmers from organisations or elsewhere. This front also includes the movement for the democratisation of communication which, in 2009, approved a resolution in support of building a Civil Rights Framework, during the 1st National Communication Conference, promoted by the Brazilian government.

For Bia Barbosa, from the Social Communication collective Intervozes, "the battle is not limited to this country. People all over the world were hoping the bill would be approved and would influence global Internet governance, a proposal that had already been made at the UN, by President Rousseff, among others", in 2013. In her speech at the UN General Assembly, Rousseff defended a multilateral civil rights framework.

Despite there being consolidated groups, "the movement's greatest strength is that it is spread like wildfire across the Internet", says Amadeu, who also took part in actions carried out by Mega Não: "Free software activists, hacktivists, activists from the movement for the democratisation of the media, activists from consumer protection entities, trade union activists, all joined forces".

The result was that only six of the 23 Articles of the Azeredo Law were approved. These were articles defining Internet crimes, such as credit card cloning and racism.

A law to prevent us from going back

Following the success of the petition against AI-5 Digital, with more than 100 thousand signatures, and the repercussion in the media, those involved incited a debate on the need to establish a law guaranteeing rights before creating any law criminalising behaviour on the Internet. The government at the time of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, called on civil society and the proposal for a Civil Rights Framework began to be drafted on a collaborative and open platform.

After more than two thousand contributions to the platform, the Ministry of Justice drafted a proposal, presented in August 2010 and sent it to be voted on in August 2011. Of all the factors that played a role in creating a Civil Rights Framework, Rená highlights digital culture, already quite advanced in the country, the expertise of the CGI.br, which monitors how the web operates from a multi-sectoral council, and the Brazilian government's progressive policy.

Sergio Amadeu emphasises that "going legislative was dangerous, but vital". Every ounce of pressure was necessary after President Dilma Rousseff declared it to be constitutionally urgent for the bill to be processed, after discovering she was under NSA surveillance, following a declaration made by former NSA agent Eduard Snowden.

"No government agency will be able to carry out surveillance without it being illegal because the Civil Rights Framework defines what privacy is. But espionage is in itself an illegal act. There is no law to prevent the NSA from doing it. It would be like having an article in the constitution preventing a military coup", Amadeu argues.

In August 2013, the Civil Rights Framework Now movement emerged, created to defend the project's three pillars: neutrality, privacy and freedom. It began working on tactics to defend the civil rights movement, creating virtual mobilisations, tweets, shares[6] and collective action to take part in, such as symbolically blocking the entrance to the Vivo-Telefonica building. "Our mobilisation was widespread, and the fact that we became a very strong political influence meant we were in danger of being engulfed by the forces. The Civil Rights Framework was used as a bargaining chip in internal battles", says Amadeu.

The reporter of the Civil Rights Framework, Member of Parliament Alessandro Molon (from the PT), had to draft six versions of the bill in order to reconcile all political forces, and to meet the Chamber of Deputies' approval[7]. The day the bill was approved, during the opening of Net Mundial, demonstrators still attempted to get President Rousseff to veto Article 15, which makes it compulsory for companies to store Internet user's data. But their request was not granted. "This was an agreement", said the president. "And you cannot break an agreement".

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[6] Joint sharing of messages on social networks.
[7] In order for a bill to become law, it must go through the Chamber of Deputies and the Federal Senate, and then, be approved by the Presidency of the Republic.

Decentralization and Social Networks

HELLEKIN

Official coordinator of the GNU/consensus project. Full-time activist and part-time developer, his libertarian ideals have inspired him to explore networks and continents in search of solutions for the empowerment and well-being of the human race. Based in Latin America, he is involved in building a public, community-based infrastructure of electronic communications networks to defend and promote local, decentralised initiatives.

Still largely unheard of two decades ago, the term "social network", has emerged today as an innovation of the Web 2.0[1]. Yet it is actually a concept that existed long before the current phenomenon of commercial concentration of social network tools. In 1933, the sociologist Jacob Levy Moreno[2] introduced the sociogram, a graphic representation of interpersonal relations with each node representing an individual and each link a social relation. The term "social network" appeared for the first time in 1954 in an article by professor John Arundel Barnes[3], in his study on social relations in a Norwegian fishing village.

Howard Rheingold, a pioneer of virtual communities and visionary chronicler of social changes related to the evolution of information and communication technology, emphasizes that" some people conflate social networks, which are the aggregate of relationships that humans have, with online social network services such as Facebook and, arguably, G+". Such a confusion reveals the origin of these services even if their role can only, at best, facilitate their emergence.

[1] Web 2.0 is a commercial concept invented to label the emergence of social interactive sites. The "2.0" doesn't represent any technical feature, but marks the attempt to wipe out the current model, i.e., the original peer-to-peer, decentralised Web.
[2] https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_Levy_Moreno
[3] Barnes, John (1954), "Class and Committees in a Norwegian Island Parish", in *Human Relations*, (7), pp 39-58



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Centralised networks, decentralised networks, distributed networks?

These concepts have evolved since Paul Baran's article on the various topologies of communication networks[4]. The following characterisations give a more social than technical perspective.

A network is said to be centralised when its integrity depends on a player without whom the network cannot function. There are a number of advantages to such an architecture for a vertical integration of services, largely due to its single decision centre and the uniformity of the technical solution. This model combines user friendliness, facilitates development and system stability. However, the service provider occupies a unique position in that they can observe their members and analyse their behaviour. It thus offers little or no protection or regard for its members' right to privacy.

A decentralised network does not rely on a single decision centre, but each member of the network is not necessarily autonomous either, and may depend on the availability of a server that links them to the rest of the network. The typical model of a decentralised network is a federation, such as email or chat networks[5]. This model is ideal for organisations that can maintain their own communication infrastructures and wish to control their communication. But

[4] Baran, Paul (1962)"On Distributed Communications Networks", presented at the First Congress on the Information System Sciences, organised by MITRE

[5] "Chatting", made possible by the low cost of digital communication, can be done via protocols such as Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and eXtensible Messaging Presence Protocol (XMPP), which existed long before narrow proprietary applications like MSN and Facebook chat.

there is the same problem as with centralised networks in that there is still an all-powerful intermediary (in information security terms, the "man in the middle").

When each node in a decentralised network is autonomous, it is called a distributed network, or a peer-to-peer (P2P) network: examples include Bittorrent[6], GNUnet[7], Tor[8], I2P[9], cjdns[10] and Bitcoin[11]. This model is the most robust against attacks from a centralised power (observation, censorship, manipulation), as it does not present any obvious vulnerability nor any particular target. Unlike the models cited above, it doesn't have a "single weak point". On the other hand, it is considerably harder to implement than a centralised network due to the environment's heterogeneity and complexity.

These architectures do not necessarily contradict one another[12]. The contradiction resides rather in the choice to protect users' privacy or to introduce surveillance. The current dominant trend in social network tools is to rely heavily on surveying users, and consequently seeks a centralised owner-based architecture, which facilitates control of users.

The ability to 'export' data should not be confused with its "transferability" or its "availability". Exporting data from a service or an application largely operates in a closed circle. Isolated from its context, this exported data is nothing but a pile of inert files, because it only comes alive once it is inserted into a social context (its connection to similar or related data, comments from other users, accumulation of knowledge through ongoing dialogue, all of which creates interdependence between different sources).

Thus, aside from a technical dissection, which is often abstract and incomplete, and looks only at the formal aspect of a network, it's important to identify the founding principles and acknowledge the complexity of ethical, social, political and economic consequences of technologies which underpin the sociability of individuals and communities.

Free software and free networks: what's the answer?

The Apocalypse according to Snowden (his sensational revelations on the NSA) confirm what free software programmers have been saying for thirty years[13]. To find out whether a system is secure, it needs to be observable. An unverifiable

[6] https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/BitTorrent_%28protocole%29
[7] https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/GNUnet
[8] https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tor_%28r%C3%A9seau%29
[9] https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/I2P
[10] http://cjdns.info/
[11] https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bitcoin
[12] A centralised service often makes use of distribution within its own infrastructure to ensure large-scale scalability.
[13] 2014 will mark the Free Software Foundation's thirtieth anniversary.



© Scottks

Bitcoin believer . New-York, January 2014.

system is by definition a simple act of faith in its creator, as Ken Thompson very astutely pointed out in 1984[14]. An information system where we cannot access the source code cannot be considered secure.[15].

Free software[16], as defined by the Free Software Foundation[17] and the GNU project[18], means that the user has four essential freedoms: 0) the freedom to use the software as one wishes; 1) the freedom to study how the software works (this includes having access to the source code); 2) the freedom to share software, including commercially; 3) the freedom to modify software according to one's own needs and to freely distribute these modifications. These four freedoms allow the user to freely take ownership of software, i.e., control it. And this encourages peers to study the source code together, just as in scientific work. It thus represents an eminently political software, developed for the common good.

Free software alternatives to proprietary platforms remain largely experimental. But their effervescence demonstrates that it could be viable to rely on social network management tools that are neither proprietary nor repressive. By definition, whether they be Web-based, with a leaning towards federated de-

[14] Thompson Ken (1984)."Reflections on Trusting Trust" (Note the shrewd and biased use of the term 'hacker', and how this vein of thinking is exploited by intelligence agencies.)
[15] The complicity of proprietary software giants in NSA global surveillance should make this point entirely irrefutable.
[16] Stallman Richard (1996)."What is Free Software?", https://gnu.org
[17] www.fsffrance.org/
[18] https://gnu.org/

centralisation, or founded on peer-to-peer (P2P) networks, aiming for a model that is more distributed between autonomous nodes, all these initiatives oppose the surveillance of users and encourage their freedom.

The GNU consensus project[19] aims to encourage and facilitate coordination of free social networking projects. Assuming that hostile entities[20] are actively present in the network, the project recommends that each network node protects itself and its legitimate correspondents against this threat. In this regard, most of the alternatives that are currently available offer little protection against the most sophisticated attackers. But they represent a necessary transition away from proprietary platforms which are unreliable by definition, due to the very fact they engage in global surveillance.

Systematic data encryption and protecting the social graph (social interactions of each individual) constitute a step forward towards a concrete and viable alternative. The GNU consensus project advocates the long-term adoption of the peer-to-peer platform GNUnet[21], and its social network add-on Secushare[22], currently still in research phase.

While waiting for GNUnet to be available to the general public, the project is also focussed on making it easier for proprietary service users to shift towards free solutions. Although the GNU consensus project sees GNUnet as the benchmark solution, it doesn't rule out different approaches. As a result, the project also endorses software programs that offer a partial solution, while trying to identify their limits and their strengths.

The following section gives a glimpse of the issues at hand and possible alternative solutions. There is a more up-to-date and detailed overview available on the GNU consensus project site. You can also refer to the collaborative list on the Prism Break[23] site which matches up proprietary applications and services and the corresponding free alternatives.

Issues and alternatives for empowerment

- **Publication**

The blog remains the most widespread form of personal publication, creating fruitful conversations in the "blogosphere". Wiki also offers a type of collective publication with less emphasis on social aspects. Yet these two forms of publication are primarily used by specialised and literary communities. And they also represent largely public interactions.

[19] https://gnu.org/consensus
[20] Illegal entities: criminals and spammers, intelligence agencies, totalitarian corporations and governments, etc.
[21] https://gnunet.org/
[22] http://secushare.org/
[23] http://prism-break.org/fr/

- **Exposure and rumour**

Facebook is the most well-known service for sharing social experiences. Twitter has combined the brevity of text messaging with the Web to create one of the Web's most popular and addictive services. Google+ offers an intermediary between the two...

The "monetisation" of profiles and the mercantile appropriation of content depends on how willing users are to give themselves over to the surveillance machine, in order to get an ostensible benefit in exchange for abstract submission, unmindful of the consequences. These include outrageous exhibitionism, widespread tattling, voluntary dependence, and a shift away from social capital to go down a superfluous capitalist track. The result of amplifying conversations beyond just a "what are you up to?" has enabled the service to dominate online sociability to such an extent that many Facebook users now confuse it with "the Internet".

The "Twitter clones" remain largely incompatible with the original due to the company's political orientation, but are working on interoperability: they include GNU social[24], Friendica[25], Pump.io[26]. A distributed solution using the same technology as Bitcoin is also in its experimental phase: Twister.[27]

- **Conversation and collective organisation**

Most of the current alternative solutions are developed separately and are mutually incompatible. These solutions do however win out over the motive of logorrhoea in that they propose collective means of organisation. They include Elgg[28] and Lorea[29], Crabgrass[30], Drupal[31], and IndieWeb[32] which is seen as both a pioneer in adopting and defining Semantic Web standards and unyielding in its stance towards the centralising trend of traders.

- **Telephony and Videoconferencing**

Skype has fallen into the hands of direct NSA collaborators since Microsoft bought it out. Google Hangouts is only accessible to Google users. The alternative service Jit.si[33] is a good option for both telephone calls and videoconferencing, or you can wait for Project Tox[34].

- **Email**

This remains one of the most widely-used applications. GnuPG allows the message to be encoded but doesn't protect the source, the recipient or the message's subject

[24] https://gnu.org/s/social
[25] http://friendica.com
[26] http://pump.io
[27] http://twister.net.co
[28] http://www.elgg.org
[29] https://lorea.org
[30] https://we.riseup.net/crabgrass
[31] https://drupal.org
[32] http://indiewebcamp.com
[33] http://jit.si/ for the service, and http://jitsi.org/ for the software.
[34] http://tox.im/ aims to replace Skype with a free solution.

(LEAP[35] is seeking to resolve this issue). Google's domination over this service with Gmail and GoogleGroups reduces its federative aspect considerably. While waiting for specialised solutions such as Pond[36], I2P-Bote[37], and BitMessage, it is recommended to use an autonomous, email service that values privacy is used such as Riseup[38] or Autistici[39], or there's the option of setting up one's own server.

• **Video sharing**

The supremacy of Youtube (again Google) in this domain leaves all its competitors far behind. Given the enormous infrastructure needed to process and send video files, there are not a lot of alternatives out there. GNU MediaGoblin[40] offers a site where one can show and share media and which supports free video formats. A new project, Wetube, is undertaking to innovate on and replace Youtube with a distributed network that uses a similar approach to Twister, based on a block chain and which offers users the incentive of payment for the amount of shared bandwidth.

• **Music sharing**

The proprietary benchmark is still SoundCloud. There doesn't seem to be much point in supplying a free alternative to this service. GNU MediaGoblin also supports audio files and could take on this role. Music-lovers can use Bittorrent, ensuring they download legal torrents and, using blocklists, avoid connecting with nodes specialised in web user monitoring or in the dissemination of malware.

Other applications and implications for the future

• **Static applications**

The UnHosted[41] project aims to keep decentralised Web applications alive by keeping the execution of the code separated from the affected data. These remain under the user's control, and applications are run on the browser and not on the server.

• **Code sharing**

Github represents a counter-example of a social proprietary service. Its contribution to the world of free software proves that commercial operation doesn't have to be about marketing users' data or putting restrictions on their freedom. There are, however, two serious competitors: Gitlab and Gitorious, and there is even a P2P version – Gitbucket. Gitlab and Gitbucket's source code is available on Github! The Github model may serve as inspiration for the concept of "venture communism" as proposed by Dmytri Kleiner[42].

[35] https://leap.se/fr
[36] https://pond.imperialviolet.org/
[37] https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/I2P#Optionnelles
[38] https://help.riseup.net/fr/email
[39] http://www.autistici.org/fr/
[40] https://gnu.org/s/mediagoblin
[41] https://unhosted.org/
[42] Kleiner, Dmytri (2010), "The Telekommuniste Manifesto", URL: http://telekommunisten.net/the-telekommunist-manifesto/



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The anual DIBI conference, 2011.

- **Massively Multiplayer**

Online Role Playing Games MMORPGs are also sites where people meet and socialise. It's easier to talk about life on Second Life, and social relations are flourishing on World of Warcraft and MineCraft. These virtual worlds generate an economy and a segment of first-world society that is specific to them. On these sites, anonymity is not so much a problem as an obligation: who wants to know that the great wizard Krakotaur spent his youth punching cards to feed a computer the size of the Ritz? If it appeals to you, you can always join the world of PlaneShift[43] or the 3D application-development world of CrystalSpace[44] in order to imagine the future of free immersive video games.

Conclusions

The major challenges of free networks are the same as those of free software: autonomy and long-term viability. The main issues that stand in the way of autonomy are financial support and marketing solutions. The infrastructure required to free cybercitizens needs to come initially from the users themselves. It can only become autonomous once users take control of it, just as they take control of other resources necessary for the preservation of the community. Sustainable development and a social and public communication infrastructure can only emerge if technological sovereignty is perceived as a commons by a critical mass of users.

[43] http://www.planeshift.it/
[44] https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crystal_Space

Behind the omnipresence of the "everything for free" concept lies colossal wealth invested by companies trying to capture an audience. The ‘everything for free’ mentality is a way of nipping competition in the bud, as only those who possess significant financial resources can play this game. However, after Snowden revealed the extent of global surveillance, certain consequences are apparent in the evolution of how research tools are used[45] and in the resurgence of official institutions’ interest in free software alternatives. This trend needs to go hand in hand with users taking responsibility themselves for their technological, material and software choices and by supporting those working towards alternative developments.

The annual funding campaign for Wikipedia states that if each person reading their notice contributed just three dollars, their funding would be complete in just two hours! It’s this image of how powerful mass participation can be that we need to tune into to reach a democratic vision of a free and public Internet. If an isolated individual doesn’t have enormous amounts of money, crowdfunding campaigns make it possible to instantly accrue the necessary amount for a given company.

Yet Crowdfunding remains a type of resource accrual that relies on consumerism: the "funder" is in fact a buyer who pays in advance for a product being offered to them. Such a campaign should be an investment for the purpose of strengthening a public infrastructure. This is the argument put forward by Dmytri Kleiner in The Telekommuniste Manifesto. Each community should be able to manage its own investments, a concept that the Lorea project already touched on in 2009.

Choosing which technologies to support obviously relies on a select group capable of technical analysis, and scientific innovation is unending. But ethical choices don’t rely on technical skill. If technicians are aware of the ethical orientation of a community, they should be able to incorporate that into their analysis. Global surveillance has arisen both because it is technically possible and because this technical decision was made with no legal or ethical restrictions, in total impunity.

The key factors to creating a public communication infrastructure that is both sustainable and healthy, that doesn’t jeopardise the private lives of citizens, and that protects the freedom of individuals and communities against totalitarian systems include: free software, decentralised, distributed services that are reproducible and community-based, autonomous nodes, participation and investment. These are all key to building the pillars of democracy for the 21st century, so that we can address together, in the plurality and diversity of individual and collective situations, the massive global problems that face us. The future of social networks begins at its source: in other words, with us.

[45] Traffic on the search engines StartPage, Ixquick and DuckDuck has multiplied five-fold following the publication of articles in *Der Spiegel* and *The Guardian*, among others, in December 2013.

Ditch Your Commercial ISP, Connect to the Non-Profit Internet![1]

MATHIEU LAPPRAND
Journalist and contributor to the news site Basta!

If you are reading these words, you are most probably connected to the Internet. Who connects you? Probably one of the big commercial players. But did you know that you don't have to go through these market structures? There also exists non-profit Internet service providers (ISPs) – organisations with a few dozen or few hundred subscribers which allow you connect with an ADSL or Wifi connection. For the price of a standard router (or only marginally more), you can access the Internet via a network that doesn't dig around in your Internet history, and play a role in your own network.

The organisation that's been around for the longest – the French Data Network – was set up in 1992, long before the current heavyweights got into the game. At this time, only a few pioneer-type organisations offered this kind of Internet access. Although non-profit players were the first to be involved in the network, they were totally marginalised with the explosion of the Internet (according to Insee, two out of three households have Internet access). Twenty-one of them are now grouped under the French Data Network (FDN)[2] and are all run by volunteers. Their founding principles[3] include volunteerism, solidarity, operating democratically and supporting Net neutrality.

Present both locally and nationally

"All the Federation's members are based on very different models and have very different ways of operating at both local and national levels", says Chair-

[1] Article firdt appeared in *Basta!* (September 4, 2013), www.bastamag.net
[2] www.ffdn.org/en
[3] www.ffdn.org/en/principles



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man Benjamin Bayart. One example of an organisation operating very locally is Sameswireless[4], which has been an Internet provider for the village Sames (in the French Pyrénées-Atlantiques region) since 2009. It currently has 150 subscribers out of the village's 200 households. For a long time there was no Internet access because it was judged to be unprofitable. Then Orange ventured in there. "The operator decided to offer ADSL access two years ago," explains Benjamin Bayart. "But it's more expensive and the quality isn't as good. Sameswireless has kept its subscribers!".

The Internet access provided by Sameswireless comes from a wifi network supplied by a neighbouring village's relay antenna. The organisation, which installed relay antennas and ensures their maintenance, offers subscribers a 8Mb/s connection for fifteen euros a month. When they join up and open their connection, users must also pay an initial 100-euro start-up fee. The non-profit ISP prices are very reasonable compared to those offered by Internet giants: for instance, FDN.fr charges twenty-nine euros a month and Franciliens.net thirty-two euros a month.

Other than wifi, other networks operate with a fibre or ADSL connection, like Aquilenet[5] in the French region of Aquitaine and Illyse[6] in the Rhône-Alpes region: with these providers, all that's required is subscribing to an Internet connection and replacing the standard router with a modem. 'Tunnels' or vir-

[4] www.sameswireless.fr/news/news.php
[5] www.aquilenet.fr
[6] www.illyse.fr

tual private networks (VPN) mean that your phone line can be connected to the ISP network of your choice. You will of course no longer have access to digital television, which is now available online, but you can still make free phone calls with the SIP (Session Initiation Protocol)[7] which offers the equivalent of Skype, but totally free.

ISPs where you hold the reins

The FDN Federation seeks to support people who wish to create their own ISP. There is nothing that complicated in this: all it requires is creating an organisation, declaring it to ARCEP[8] (a French agency in charge of regulating telecommunications), sort out a few technical issues and obviously, have a bit of time to spare. A wiki step-by-step guide[9] is available on the Federation's site. This provides support for the administrative side of things as well. The French Data Network can also give a hand by hosting the new ISP for as long as it takes to get enough subscribers to become autonomous. "The ideal setup is to have a few thousand euros and between fifty and a hundred potential subscribers," says Benjamin Bayart.

Up until recently, only a few activists convinced enough of the importance of non-profit Internet access were involved in these organisations. Today the movement is experiencing a new lease of life: there are approximately forty projects currently in the pipeline, backed by the Federation (see the project map[10]). One reason for this resurgence is the increasingly visible and explicit attacks against Net neutrality by interest groups. Neutrality is supposed to guarantee equal access to the Internet, irrespective of your operator, your contract, or the websites that you visit. But the Hadopi legislation against downloading alleged illegal sites, Edward Snowden's revelations about surveillance methods in the United States and the practices of some ISPs attempting to make certain content more or less difficult to access are all jeopardising this neutrality.

Controlling information and traffic flow

"Standard Internet Service Providers (ISP) have issues generating sufficient profit and seek to produce at the lowest possible price," explains Benjamin Bayart. "They're ready to restrict access and sacrifice service quality and the hotline in order to optimise their costs. Whereas we are producing the network that subscribers want". Being an Internet Service Provider is not a very profitable activity, because it requires substantial infrastructure work: digging up pavements, putting in cables, and so forth. But the value of the information travel-

[7] http://datatracker.ietf.org/wg/sip/charter/
[8] http://arcep.fr
[9] www.ffdn.org/wiki/doku.php?id=documentation
[10] http://db.ffdn.org/

ling through the pipes is enormous, as evidenced by the current capitalisation of Google, Facebook and Apple. And it's very tempting for whoever owns the pipe to take a peek at what is going through it, and even to prioritise certain content – at a price.

When last spring certain Orange subscribers noticed that Youtube was taking a long time to load, the operator replied[11]: "We are currently in discussion with YouTube to improve the loading of videos available on their site". Strangely, the quality of videos available on Dailymotion (a video-sharing platform and rival to Youtube) on the Orange Network has not had any issues. Unrelated of course to the fact that Dailymotion is entirely owned by… Orange. It's all too clear that everyone feels free to filter what they want.

Raising awareness of abusive practices carried out by certain players on the Net can only give more impetus to ISP alternatives. "After local ISPs, future non-profit service providers can come together around common interests," estimates Benjamin Bayart. We're on the road to taking control of the way in which we communicate.

FURTHER READING

- The FDN Federation website: www.ffdn.org
- List of non-profit service providers: www.ffdn.org/en/members
- List of steps for creating a DIY ISP: www.ffdn.org
- Detailed organisation of the Sameswireless network: www.sameswireless.fr
- The conference "Internet, enjeux politiques et sociétaux" by Benjamin Bayart (in French): www.jfl2010.fr/videos/bayart.php

[11] Read Guillauem Campeau's article " Orange discute avec You Tube pour améliorer la vitesse d'accès", *Numerama* (March 31, 2013) (in French); www.numerama.com

PirateBox or How to Escape the Big Brothers of the Internet[1]

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What if, at some future event, a demonstration or a rally against austerity policies or against the oligarchy of the "1%", along with the usual appeals for action and more or less subversive texts cluttering the pockets and handbags of participants, the organizers offered an alternative? Setting up one or more PirateBoxes around the event venue, which protesters would then be able to connect to and download opinion pieces, grass-roots information, reference books or documentaries directly onto their phones. A PirateBox makes it possible to create a local wireless network, disconnected from the Internet and thus from government surveillance programs such as Prism (United States) and Frenchelon (France)[2], among others. Anyone who wants to, as long as they are close enough (several dozen metres), can connect anonymously and access any content available and be free from all tracking programs.

Developed under a free license, this little device has is roots in the DIY philosophy, a movement seeking to create alternatives to our massively consumerist culture. The project, making it possible to share documents with your neighbours and relatives through an anonymous and free WiFi, emerged in 2011. Its inventor, David Darts[3],chairs the Art Department at New York University. Jean Debaecker, professor at Lille 3 University, has been instrumental in publicising this initiative in France. Since then, the project has caught on, and a small community of enthusiasts are investing a lot of energy into its development. The first PirateBox Camp[4] was held last summer in Berlin.

[1] Article firdt appeared in *Basta!* (September 5, 2013), www.bastamag.net
[2] Read Jean-Marc Manach's article "Frenchelon: la carte des stations espion du renseignement françis", (June 16, 2009) (in French). http://bugbrother.blog.lemonde.fr
[3] http://daviddarts.com/
[4] http://camp.piratebox.de



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Piratebox.

A tool, a philosophy, a state of mind

A PirateBox usually takes the form of a small box. The required equipment costs under forty euros. A slightly "tweaked" router (connection sharing tool) emits the wireless signal and a USB key is used for storing shared or received data. One hour of computer tinkering is enough to set the whole thing up. No need for a soldering iron: all you need is a computer and an Internet connection! And don't worry: there are a number of well-documented tutorials (see links below) that offer a step-by-step guide for beginners. It is also possible to turn an android phone or an old laptop into a PirateBox.

Some public libraries in France, as in Aulnay (Seine-Saint-Denis)[5] and Lezoux (Puy-de-Dôme)[6] already offer access to a number of works (books, movies, music) via PirateBox. As a PirateBox ensures total anonymity, there is no way to count connections ... which somewhat complicates assessing the extent of its use. But the experience has already spurred the development of a derivative tool, Bibliobox.

What makes these 'free culture' initiatives so powerful? The fact that they are infinitely adaptable. Many projects now underway derived from the initial PirateBox. The CoWbox project[7] (CoW as in co-working) aims to create collaborative workspaces: working documents, text or graphics that are shared among multiple authors. The space created by the CoWbox is secure and confidential,

[5] http://espacenumeriqueaulnay.blogspot.f (in French)
[6] http://footnotes.fr
[7] http://cowboxisen.tumblr.com

unlike GoogleDrive, Dropbox and other online sharing services, to which no one knows who actually has access. A CoWbox server fits in your hand and consumes very little energy. And above all, you are in control of it. The CoWbox is built from a 35-euro computer, the Raspberry Pi[8].

And soon, alternative Internet networks?

Another project allows you to create a network between several PirateBoxes. Users connected to one of these PirateBoxes can communicate and exchange various content between themselves. Some PirateBoxes can provide coverage to one or more buildings, or even a whole village – the beginnings of an alternative network to the Internet! This type of network (called a mesh network) is not only completely autonomous, but it also allows users to connect and share Internet access ... still anonymously. If we are still a long way from a full-scale alternative network to mainstream commercial providers, this is undeniably a first step to get around them[9].

Creating your own computer network is not inconsequential. Whistleblower Edward Snowden recently confirmed what many suspected[10]: Internet multinationals and intelligence services are involved in a massive monitoring of Internet users, the purpose and magnitude of which no one knows. The original spirit of an open Internet seems lost. Therefore appropriating and understanding the technologies that we use on a daily basis is a major democratic issue. The PirateBox is an example of "hacking": diverting an object from its initial use. If supporting defenders of Net neutrality[11], is more important than ever, it is equally important that we take control of the tools that will free us from what looks increasingly like widespread surveillance.

FURTHER READING

- The website of the PirateBox creator: http://wiki.daviddarts.com
- Presentation and tutorials by Jean Debaecker (in French): http://piratebox.c.la/
- Another tutorial website (in French): http://pirateboxfr.com/
- Different ways to create a PirateBox (with a router, a phone or a computer): http://wiki.labomedia.org
- Customising your PirateBox: http://sylvain.naud.in/
- The CoWbox project: http://cowboxisen.tumblr.com
- Networking between PirateBoxes (version 1.0beta): http://forum.daviddarts.com

[8] Read Nicolas hachet's article "Le mesh est-il l'avenir des communications numériques ?" (in French) http://www.framboise314.fr/

[9] Read Edward Snowden's testimany: "J'avais la capacité sans aucun mandat, de lire toutes vos communications" (september 2nd, 2013), http://blog.nicolashachet.com (in French)

[10] Read the article "X Keystore: le Google de la NSA, selon la presse" (August 1st, 2013), http://reflets.info (in French)

[11] www.laquadrature.net/

Hacklabs and Hackerspaces: Shared Machine Workshops

MAXIGAS

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Can you imagine professional and would-be engineers building their own Disneyland? It happens in most European capitals. Hacklabs and hackerspaces[1] are shared machine workshops run by hackers for hackers. They are rooms or buildings where people interested in technology can come together to socialise, create and share knowledge, and work on projects individually or as a team. In addition to the fixed space, there are also regular hacker gatherings with a set time to meet. Thus a shared space and time of discourse is constructed, where meanings are negotiated and circulated, establishing what can be called a scene.

Hacklabs and hackerspaces belong to a diverse and blurred family taxonomy of shared machine workshops. Tech shops, co-working spaces, incubators, innovation and media labs, various kinds of hubs, and fablabs and makerspaces – listed here in order of co-optation – all try to emulate and capitalise on the technocultural force galvanised by hacklabs and hackerspaces. Explicit references on the websites of such organisations to the concept of 'community'[2] quickly betray them as lacking the very values they advertise. After all, contemporary capitalism is increasingly dependent on authenticity and coolness, which it mines from the underground.[3]

Regarding the differences between hackers and makers, there is no clear line between them. Some hackerspace members state that hackers are not just making,

[1] http://hackerspaces.org
[2] http://techshops.ws
[3] Liu, Alan (2004). *The Laws of Cool*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Fleming, Peter (2009). *Authenticity and the Cultural Politics of Work: New Forms of Informal Control*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

but also breaking things, while one makerspace member complained that "hackers never finish anything".[4] In marketing materials, discursive strategies vary in how they manoeuvre around the four letter word ('HACK') in order to both tame its negative implications and maximise on its positive associations. While the hacker ethos is often held up as a central system of values which permeates the scene, it may be more useful to understand it not as an a priori moral ground, but rather as a practice-based orientation which stems from the social context and social history in which hacklabs and hackerspaces are embedded: the way they 'sit' in the social fabric. It thus varies widely with the context, as we shall presently see.

The following section briefly traces the historical trajectories of both hacklabs and hackerspaces, including their intersections. It should be noted that the current configurations presented below are not the only possible way they can or did work. The subsequent section explores the potential and social significance of currently established hacklabs and hackerspaces, and the last section evaluates these tactics from a strategic-political point of view.

Historical trajectory

The stories and histories below are confined to Europe, with which I am most familiar.

• Hacklabs

Hacklabs have basically existed since the advent of the personal computer,[5] but their 'golden age' was the decade around the turn of the millennium (greatly inspired by the Hackmeeting in Milan in 1999)[6]. Often located in squatted spaces and occupied social centres, they were part and parcel of the autonomous politics toolbox, on par with such practices as Food Not Bombs community vegan kitchens, anarchist infoshops and libraries, free shops and punk concert halls[7]. For instance, the Les Tanneries, an occupied social centre in Dijon (see Fig.1) housed all these activities at some point,[8] as did the RampART in London,[9] the Rimaia in Barcelona,[10] and the Forte Prenestino in Rome[11]. The largest network of hacklabs existed in Italy,[12] where influential hacklabs bloomed all over the country, with the LOA hacklab in the populous North (Milan), the aforementioned Forte and BugsLab in Rome and Freaknet[13], known to be the first of its kind, in Catania, Sicily.

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[4] Verbatim quote from Debora Lanzeni.

[5] Halleck, Dee Dee (1998). "The Grassroots Media of Paper Tiger Television and the Deep Dish Satellite Network." *Crash Media* (2).

[6] www.hackmeeting.org/hackit99

[7] Maxigas (2012). "Hacklabs and Hackerspaces – Tracing Two Genealogies." *Journal of Peer Production* 2. http://peerproduction.net

[8] http://tanneries.squat.net

[9] http://therampart.wordpress.com

[10] https://n-1.cc/g/universitat-lliure-larimaia and http://web.archive.org/web/20130313184945/http://unilliurelarimaia.org

[11] http://www.forteprenestino.net

[12] Link collection Austistici/Inventati: http://www.autistici.org/hacklab

[13] www.freaknet.org



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Fablab. Brussels.

There is a perceptible division in the concerns of participants and what their activities focus on, with North European hacklabs leaning towards security and circumvention and South European ones more bent on media production.[14] For instance, the German Chaos Computer Club is known to have publicly hacked into various major state and corporate systems since 1985 (Bildschirmtext bank transactions[15] and more recently, Biometric passports)[16], while Dutch mag Hack-Tic had to close down in 1993 for publishing exploits. In Barcelona, hacklab Riereta[17] became famous for their ground-breaking work in live streaming, as did the Dyne "Free Culture Foundry"[18] for its work in (real time) multimedia processing and multimedia operating systems (Dynebolic Live CD)[19]. Today, notable examples exist in Amsterdam (LAG)[20] and near Barcelona (Hackafou)[21]. Both operate in larger autonomous spaces: the Binnenpret[22] in Amsterdam where LAG is located is a legalised (ex-squat) building complex which houses an anarchist library, the OCCI self-managed musical venue, a vegan restaurant, the Revolutions Per Minute record label and apartments; while Calafou where Hackafou is based, calls itself an eco-industrial, post-capitalist colony based on a cooperativist model, and includes a furniture manufactory, a chicken farm, the TransHackFeminist Hardlab Pechblenda[23] and flats.

[14] Insight from groente
[15] www.textfiles.com/news/boh-20f8.txt
[16] Von Randow Thomas (1994). " Bidshirmtext: A blow against system; *Die Ziet*, november 30. On line: http://archive.is/Blfd
[17] http://web.archive.org/web/20121016060835/http://www.riereta.org/wp
[18] http://dyne.org
[19] http://www.dynebolic.org
[20] http://laglab.org
[21] https://calafou.org/en/proyectos/hackafou
[22] http://binnenpr.home.xs4all.nl
[23] http://pechblenda.hotglue.me

Around the turn of the millennium, when modem connections were considered modern, it was sometimes only possible to connect to the Internet (or its predecessors, like BBSs and networks like FidoNet) by getting down to your local hacklab. These 'squatted Internet workspaces' – as they were sometimes called in the North of Europe – did not only facilitate virtual connections between people and machines but also contributed to the formation of embodied counter-computing communities. Personal computers were still scarce, so "members of the collective scavenged and rebuilt computers from trash".[24] Obsolete computers and discarded hardware would often find its way to hacklabs and were transformed into useful resources – or failing that, into artworks or political statements. Mobile phones and popular voice-over-IP solutions like Skype did not exist when hackers from WH2001 (Wau Holland 2001) in Madrid and BugsLab in Rome set up phone booths on the street where immigrants could call home for free. GNU/Linux development had not yet achieved a critical mass, so installing an open source operating system was an art or a craft, not a routine operation. Although free software had some characteristics of a movement, it had not yet been established as a lucrative segment of the market, and hacklabs housed many developers. Hacklabs seamlessly combined three functions: providing a social and work space for underground technology enthusiasts to learn and experiment; supporting and participating in social movements; and providing the public with open access to information and communication technologies. In cyberspace, everything was still fluid and there was an overwhelming intuitive sense, inspired paradoxically by cyberpunk literature, that if the losers of history learned fast enough, they could outflank "the system". Evidently, hacklabs were political projects which appropriated technology as part of a larger scheme of the autonomous movement to transform and self-organise all parts of life. Therefore, technological sovereignty is interpreted here as the sovereignty of autonomous social movements; as a technology free from capital and state control.

• Hackerspaces

Hackerspaces came about through a transversal current, related to the advent of physical computing[25]: the idea that you can program, control, and communicate with things other than a computer, due to the availability of microcontrollers on the consumer market, together with the beginnings of open source software/hardware platforms like the Arduino on the hobbyist market. Arduinos leveraged the power of microcontrollers to bring physical computing within the reach of even novice programmers who didn't specialise in machine control. The idea of physical computing was inspiring in the post-dotcom-bubble era, when the increasing concentration of Internet-based services in the hands of a few major US based multinational corporations like Google, Facebook and Amazon made web development, interaction design and network engineering both ubiquitous and utterly boring.

[24] Wikipedia contributors, 2014. ASCII (squat). http://en.wikipedia.org
[25] Igoe, Tom, and O'Sullivan Dan (2004). *Physical Computing: Sensing and Controlling the Physical World with Computers*. London: Premier Press.

The subsequent range of technologies, including 3D printers, laser cutters, CNC machines (all digital fabrication tools), and quadcopters (the hacker version of drones), DNA synthesisers and software-defined radios – were all built on the extended knowledge and availability of microcontrollers. It is not far-fetched to say that every few years hackerspaces absorb a major technology from the military-industrial complex, and come up with a DIY-punk version to be reintegrated into post-industrial capitalism.

As opposed to hacklabs, hackerspaces interface with the modern institutional grid through legal entities (associations or foundations), and rent spaces[26] financed through a club-like membership model. Their social basis is comprised of independent-minded technology professionals who like to explore technologies without the confines of the market, and whose level of knowledge and generous paychecks allow them to articulate the relative autonomy of their class in such collective initiatives. Such a constellation allows the assorted freaks, anarchists, unemployed con ('media') artists, and so on to tag along.

It is worth recalling Bifo's testimony comparing his experience in organising the industrial working class in the 1970s and his contemporary activism organising precarious artists.[27] The main difference he refers to, concerning practical issues, is the difficulty of finding a shared time and space where and when collective experiences and subject formation can take place. Hackerspaces address both issues rather effectively, combining 24 hour access and the membership model with their own brand of social technologies to ensure coordination.

In terms of engaging civil society in hacklabs and hackerspaces, it is crucial to understand how the productive processes are carried out in these social contexts. Participants are driven by a curiosity about technology and the desire for creation. They are passionate about understanding technology and building their own creations from the available components, whether they be communication protocols, functional or dysfunctional technological artefacts, techno-garbage or raw materials like wood and steel. This often necessitates a degree of reverse engineering: opening up, taking apart, and documenting how something works; and then putting it together in a different way, or combining it with other systems – altering its functionality in the process. Such reinvention is often understood as hacking.

Tinkering and rapid prototyping are two other concepts which are used to theorise hacker activity. The former emphasises the incremental and exploratory aspect of how hackers work, as well as the contrast with planned industrial design

[26] In the Netherlands some hackerspaces rent "antisquat" properties which come with a low price and a disadvantageous contract, a scheme initially established by rental companies to fend off squatters from the property.
[27] Berardi Franco (a.k.a. Bifo), Berardi Franco, Jacquemet Marco and Vitali Gianfranco (2009). *Shadow communication and Power in Italy,* New York: Autonomedia.

projects, and ideals of the scientific method as a top-down process departing from general principles and moving towards problems of concrete technological implementation. The latter foregrounds the dynamics of such work, where the emphasis is often on producing interesting results rather than understanding clearly everything that is involved, or maintaining full control over the development environment. Those who seek to exploit hackers under the guise of collaboration often overlook this aspect, resulting in mutual frustrations. Indeed, calling something a hack can refer to the fact that it is crudely put together with the purpose of being useful in a particular situation, without much consideration or knowledge – or the opposite: that it is a work of genius, solving a complex and often general problem with striking simplicity and robustness.

The politics of hackerspaces is similarly ambiguous: compared with hacklabs, where technology is more or less subordinate to political perspectives, in hackerspaces politics is most often framed by technology[28]. Participants of the latter often feel deeply about issues like freedom of information, privacy and security, as well as measures (be they legal or technological) which restrict technological experimentation, such as patents and copyright, because these issues touch upon their own conditions of self-expression[29]. Likewise, traditional social struggles such as the redistribution of power and wealth, or structural oppression due to physical differences such as gender and race leave many of them untouched. While they tend to frame their claims and demands in universalistic terms, or in the language of pure efficiency,[30] they fail to exercise solidarity with other social groups.

One issue is that although theoretically they avidly defend the idea of user controlled technology, their universalistic ideal often boils down to 'engineer controlled technology'. Hackerspaces may be lacking the motivation or the tools to build a sociologically-concrete political subject that goes beyond their own ranks. Fortunately, the issues that are most important to them overlap with those of more exploited and oppressed social groups, so that the deficiencies of their political perspective can only be detected at its blind spots. An even more hopeful sign is that there has been an increasing diversification of the hackerspace audience over the last few years. Inspired by makerspaces, many hackerspaces began organising outreach activities for children[31], while new spaces with a gender focus have been set up, as a result of the dissatisfaction with inclusivity in mainstream hackerspaces.[32]

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[28] Maxigas. Hacklabs and Hackerspaces: Framing Technology and Politics. Presentation IAMCR (International Association of Media and Communication Researchers, annual conference), Dublin. http://www.iamcr2013dublin.org

[29] Kelty, Christopher M. (2008). *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. http://twobits.net/.

[30] Söderberg, Johan (2013). "Determining Social Change: The Role of Technological Determinism in the Collective Action Framing of Hackers." *New Media & Society,* 15 (8) (January), pp.1277–1293. http://nms.sagepub.com

[31] Becha (2012). "Hackerspaces Exchange." https://events.ccc.de/congress/2012

[32] Toupin Sophie (2013). "Feminist Hackerspaces as Safer Spaces?" *Feminist Journal of Art and Digital Culture,* (27). http://dpi.studioxx.org



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Helsinki Hacklab Model Expo 2013.

Potentials and limitations

Hackerspaces arguably fall outside the grid of modern institutions, since they are not affiliated with the state, they are not interested in participating in the market with the aim of capital accumulation, and – with some exceptions – lack the ambitions associated with civil society, such as representing other actors, mobilising the population and pressuring State institutions. Of course, each country varies in they stance they take: while in Germany the Chaos Computer Club, which is associated with many local hackerspaces[33], is a consultative body of the Constitutional Court of Germany, and thus represents a position of professionalism, hackerspaces in the Netherlands[34] blend into the alternative landscape between artist workshops and small startups.

At the same time, relative autonomy does not just imply an outsider position, it also points to a degree of internal organisation. Hackerspaces are propelled by the hacker culture which is as old as personal computers: according to some, it was the struggles of hackers, often verging on illegality, which spawned the personal computer[35]. Hackerspaces are littered with old computers and networking hardware. An extreme example is Hack42[36], (in Arnhem, The Netherlands), which sports a full scale computing history museum ranging from typewriters,

[33] Like the c-base hackerspace in Berlin, muCCC hackerspace in Munich, or CCC Mainz. See http://c-base.org/, http://muccc.org/events/ and http://www.cccmz.de
[34] http://hackerspaces.nl
[35] Levy, Steven (1984). Hackers: *Heroes of the Computer Revolution*. Garden city: Anchor Press/ Doubleday.
[36] See https://hack42.org/.

the legendary PDP-11 from the 1970s through to more contemporary models. Lastly, autonomy is relative because it does not achieve or strive for complete independence and self-sufficiency – i.e., sovereignty – from the state. This forms a strong contrast with hacklabs, which usually operate without a legal body and inhabit autonomous zones of some kind. So while hacklab members can hide effectively behind pseudonymous monikers without further questioning, hackerspace members can make up names, but in most countries they have to give their real name and address to become members.

So while hacklabs take an anarchist approach in their ideological head-on opposition to the state, hackerspaces question state legitimacy in playful ways.[37] This can work on a level of immanence, either by simply applying the right repertoire of existing technologies to the right situation (creating a website for a good cause, or rendering it dysfunctional) or developing existing or new tools, like porting a 3D printer driver from Windows to GNU/Linux operating system, or inventing a universal remote with a single button to turn off any TV.[38]

Strategic outlook

While hacklabs operated with a clear political mission based on a more or less well- articulated political ideology, hackerspaces explicitly deny their political engagement. These strategies have their own advantages and pitfalls. On the one hand, the hacklabs of old would directly engage in social conflicts, bringing their technological expertise to the cause – and yet they remained enclosed in what is colloquially called the activist ghetto. While helping to gain an edge and access the once widespread infrastructure of the autonomous movement, their alignment severely limited their social impact as well as their proliferation. On the other hand, hackerspaces can and do draw on their own resources due to the relative affluence of their members and their close connections with the industry, while being able to reach a wider audience and collaborate with social groups across the full spectrum of society. Their increasing numbers (over 2000+ registered on hackerspaces.org) greatly exceed that of hacklabs even in their heyday, and are no doubt (at least, partly) due to these factors of apolitical affluence. Hackerspaces went beyond the historical limits of hacklabs, yet they lost political coherency in the process.

However, declarations of political neutrality should always be regarded with some scepticism. Most hackerspace members agree that "technology is not neutral", and that it is the "continuation of politics by other means": question-

[37] Several examples: The hackerspace passport is document where visitors to hackerspaces can collect stamps called visas. The Hackerspaces Global Space Program launched in 2011 with the mockup goal to "send a hacker to the moon in 23 years". SpaceFED is a federated authentication system for (wireless) network access across hackerspaces analogous to eduroam which is used in higher education institutions worldwide.

[38] The TV-B Gone Kit'at: http://learn.adafruit.com/tv-b-gone-kit

ing technological rationality, as well as the oppressive essence of technology, is common parlance in conversations, even if this is not something hackerspaces would plaster all over their flags. Overall, however, the main contribution of both hacklabs and hackerspaces to radical political transformation is their tireless work on establishing user control over technologies, and progressively expanding the range of these technologies, whether they be software, hardware or biology. Hackerspaces need to systematically raise awareness of the significance of these practices and the solidities they imply.

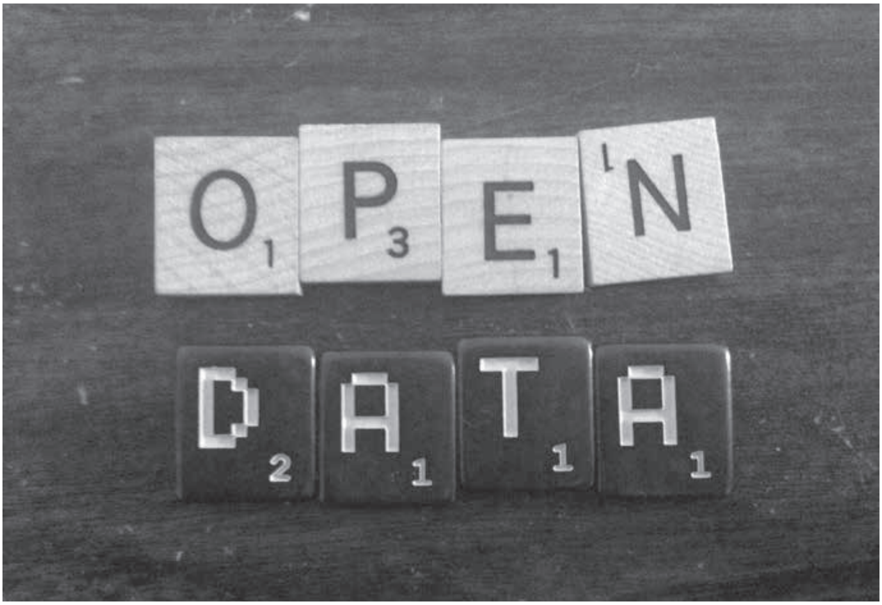
Open data: a Commons?

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Open data refers to the proactive public release of data by (primarily) public administrations, to enable value creation by citizens and businesses, greater transparency of government action, and civic participation. From a legal point of view, this data has to be released under so-called open licenses, allowing anyone to use the data as long as they mention its source and share any improvement under the same license. Given that open data is poised to become common practice for governments, does this mean we are witness to the emergence of a digital commons? Who are the communities that demand open data and defend it as a commons?

Let us first recall that open data originates in long-standing practices of dissemination and sharing of information. Access to information held by government was one of the central demands of the French Revolution. Article 15 of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen stipulates that "Society has the right to require of every public agent an account of his administration". After World War II, the demand for accountability of public officials gained fresh momentum with the emergence of the concept of "open government", which requires that citizens have access to state secrets. Facing criticism about the army's lack of transparency during the Vietnam War, President Johnson passed the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) in 1966, which gives every citizen the right to acquire information held by an administration, subject to certain conditions of confidentiality and national security. FOIA-like provisions were adopted in most democratic countries and transparency of public action is now widely seen as a fundamental right.

The first instances of voluntary exchange of data emerged in the realm of science. With the development of computer networks and computing capabilities, sharing of scientific data has grown considerably. Genome sequencing is a particularly illustrative example, given that it requires large-scale exchange of data between laboratories with specialized research infrastructure. Bruno Strasser, in his



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study on the exchange of genetic data[1], recounts how, when the first genome database, GenBank, was created, it triggered a substantial debate on the need for data sharing. According to Strasser, sharing of scientific data is part of a "moral economy", where researchers provide data if there is a compensation in terms of symbolic capital. He mentions the case of GenBank, which managed to establish itself as the main DNA database because it did not consider the data as its property, unlike the competing project, the Atlas of Protein Sequence. Since 1990, scientists are obliged to publish any scientific article which uses genome data on GenBank. These scientific practices, which pioneered large-scale data sharing, were not yet called "open data". It was in 1995 that the term first appeared, in a report by the US National Academy of Science entitled "On the Full and Open Exchange of Scientific Data", in which the Academy demanded the sharing of data collected by satellites.

While the practice of open data was already well established in science, open data as a political claim first developed in the UK. In 2006, the *Guardian* published an op-ed demanding that all data held by the British government be made freely available. Titled "Give us back our crown jewels", the op-ed demanded in particular that data from the Ordnance Survey, the United Kingdom's Geographical Institute, the use of which was subject to the payment of a fee, be made publicly available. The argument, which later became a key principle of open data, was that this data should be made public because it was produced with taxpayer money. In 2007, the open data movement entered the political debate in the United States, following

[1] Strasser Bruno J (2011). "The Experimenter's Museum GenBank, Natural History, and the Moral Economies of Biomedicine," *Isis*, vol. 102, no. 1, pp. 60–96.

a meeting held in Sebastopol, California, which featured well-known digital activists such as Lawrence Lessig, Tim O'Reilly and Aaron Swartz. The purpose of the meeting was to formulate principles that could be taken up by candidates for the US presidential election. These principles included the release of public data in their entirety as soon as it is produced and in the form it is collected, together with an open license for reuse by anyone. This demand for "raw" data signals the emergence of a new era of transparency, based on the reduction of information asymmetries between public administrations and citizens. It also sought to trigger a wave of innovation through developers and businesses reusing this data, as well as a better use of public resources. The open data movement led to a proliferation of government web portals such as, at national level, data.gov, launched in the United States in 2008, data.gov.uk; launched in the UK in 2009, and data.gouv.fr in France in 2011. In 2013, the principles of open data were taken up by the G8 in its "open data charter", with the same objectives of transparency and economic value creation. The charter also stipulates that open data would become the default practice of the eight signatory countries' public administrations.

A resource that is not managed as a commons

Open data demands are based on the argument that data produced by government and funded with public money is a common good that should be shared with society. But is the data effectively being managed as a commons? Are there governance mechanisms that would allow society to manage open data as a shared resource?

By requiring "raw" data, open data activists have attracted attention to previously unshared documents that are used in the daily work of administration officials. Publication of these documents is unusual for public administrations, which naturally leads to resistance and doubts. Most of the information published on open data portals is administrative recordings, not statistical data produced specifically to create a general knowledge about society. This data is effectively produced to meet the needs of an administrative department, not to build a resource that can be used by citizens. The selection of data to be published on these open data portals is also subject to negotiation between the people in charge of publishing the data and the producers of the data. This selection process, which we were able to observe during a field study in French administrations[2], goes against the fundamental principles of open data, as defined in 2007 in Sebastopol, which require the release of all public data as soon as it is produced. In practice, the data is selected by administrations according to various criteria such as the technical ease of extraction, interest for potential re-users, and the publication of similar data on other open data portals.

[2] Denis Jérôme et Goeta Samuel. "La fabrique des données brutes. Le travail en coulisses de l'open data", in *Penser l'écosystème des données. Les Enjeux Scientifiques et Politiques des données numériques,* Nabir C., Plantin, JC. and Monnager Smith (eds), éditions FMSH, to be published. Available online: http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr



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Moreover, the issue of data sensitivity, that is to say, the risk that its release would create for the public but also for the administration that produced it, is often a crucial consideration. Finally, the data is processed before its publication; it is not published in its unaltered, raw form. Data producers edit the data to remove problematic elements, improve formatting or remove comments, acronyms and columns that have no interest outside of the production environment.

All these steps, crucial in the construction of public data, occur away from the users' gaze. Production, selection and modification of public data is a process that is invisible to citizens; it is behind the scenes of these administrations that government transparency is produced. Nor do citizens have any opportunity to participate in the governance of how this data is produced and distributed. Yet such a possibility exists for data from statistical agencies whose task is to produce a general knowledge about society. Since 1972, French government statistics are subject to shared governance by a coordinating body, the National Council of Statistics (CNIS), which includes representatives of public institutions, trade unions, employers' organisations, research institutions and civil society. CNIS has a say on the need for producing and distributing data, and on categorizing the data produced by statistical agencies. There is no similar form of shared governance for public administrations' data, which remains out of citizens' control.

Commoners: producing and managing data as commons

In the absence of effective and accountable governance of public data, commoners have seized on public data to preserve their nature as commons. The Open

Knowledge Foundation, a global network advocating open content and data, released in 2009 the Open Database License (ODbL) which applies the principle of copyleft to open data - which was previously impossible because the Creative Commons licenses do not apply to databases. The ODbL requires sharing the reused data under the same license, thus preserving its character as a commons. Jurisdictions such as that of Paris have used this license to avoid any "enclosure" of its data, fearing that its exploitation by private interests would not benefit the community in return. Commoners also contributed to the emergence of public data as a commons by republishing their own improved data. In France, Regards Citoyens automatically extracts data from the websites of the National Assembly and the Senate and republishes it on its ‘citizen observatory’ of parliamentary activity, nosdeputes.fr and nossenateurs.fr. This data, republished as open data in machine-usable formats, enabled the development of many other tools for monitoring parliamentary activity. Similarly, the OpenCorporates website gathers data from the business registers of 75 jurisdictions around the world, and allows anyone to use this data, even for commercial purposes, as long as the ShareAlike clause, which secures the data as a commons, is respected.

In addition, citizens have also produced databases managed as commons. The best-known one is OpenStreetMap (OSM), a global geographic data base that was founded in 2004 by a British researcher following the refusal of the Ordnance Survey to share its data. OSM relies on the contributions of citizens to publish a "cartographic Wikipedia". The database now covers most countries in the world and competes with Google Maps. In 2013, OSM celebrated its millionth contributor. In the field of science, TeleBotanica is a network of both professional and amateur botanists who collaboratively create a shared database on the flora and fauna of the world. One could also mention OpenFoodFacts, which allows everyone to scan the nutritional data on food packages, or OpenMeteoData, for the free sharing of meteorological data. All these projects are based on citizen participation with the objective of creating databases under free licenses, which complement public data, and they all enable a shared governance of these critical digital assets.

IT Work as Commons Work: the Case of Koumbit[1]

ANNE GOLDENBERG

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This article analyses the political, economic and relational aspects of Koumbit, a Quebec-based group of IT workers who provide web-related services to non-profit groups and activists in Quebec.

The way the organisation is run is based on the free software model, anti-capitalist and participatory economy theory, self-management and anarchist systems. The group itself has documented its organisational practices online with a wiki, but there have also been several sociological studies of them[2]. Their focus on transparency and shared participation, combined with the group's concern for well-being, leads us to believe that Koumbit sees their work as commons work. They serve as an inspiration for improving working conditions in information technology.

Koumbit: a politicised workplace promoting Internet solidarity

Koumbit, based in Montreal, is a group of IT workers who, inspired by free software, participatory economy theory and activist self-management practices, have created an empowered, politicised and reproducible workplace. Koumbit is derived from a Haitian Creole word which roughly translates as "association of people working towards the realisation of a common goal". This pillar of inspiration thus puts work at the core of the project: the work itself becomes a commons.

[1] This article is based on research on Koumbit carried out by the author, at the Laboratory of Computer-Mediated Communication (LabCMO) at the University of Quebec, Montreal (Goldenberg 2006, 2008) and an article on Hacking with Care (Goldenberg, 2012).

[2] https://wiki.koumbit.net

Koumbit is a well-known social group in Québec. They host and provide services for a number of activist and socially-engaged projects in Montreal and Quebec. They have, on several occasions, demonstrated their commitment, solidarity and political stance in regards to social movements by, among other gestures, protecting their members and clients from police seeking to track down authors of activist and critical articles.

Koumbit's founding members began working together at the time of the alter-globalisation protests against the Summit of Americas in Quebec, in April 2001. They set up an alternative media platform (cmaq.net), which they continued to work on (on a voluntary basis), along with other sites, in partnership with local activist groups. In 2004, several members decided to create a more sustainable system to ensure their services would continue to be available. So for activist groups, creating a work group became the *sine qua non* for the survival of web and software services. For a number of workers, it was also an opportunity to fuse their values with that of their everyday work.

Members of the group shared their theoretical, political and economic inspirations, one example being participatory economy (ParEcon), an economic model put forward by theoretician Michael Albert and economist Robin Hahnel (Albert and Hahnel, 2003), which aimed to provide an alternative to capitalism and a planned economy, emphasising values such as equity, solidarity, diversity and self-management. The founding members tried to reproduce the idea of "balanced job complex", by encouraging workers to have a balanced workload and by dividing tasks in a way that ensured equal amounts of power and pleasure. These tasks could be carried out on a rotational basis.

En 2005, there was still some vagueness about what constituted a "paid" task. Although web design contracts were paid, certain tasks were done for free because there was not yet any formal way of remunerating these. They included maintenance work and tasks requiring thoroughness and attention to detail (system administration, accounting, office duties, facilitation services), tasks that resemble what Sylvia Federicci (2011) calls "reproductive activities", and which are often inadequately recognised in both commons practices and in society in general. In the technical world these tasks remain just as invisible (Denis, 2012), even if they are paid (compared to the reproductive activities Federicci describes, such as childcare and housework). At Koumbit, there has been much internal debate over payment for these maintenance tasks.

Furthermore, certain workers have argued for the need to keep certain tasks free without theoretically having to justify how they serve the group. So some members kept devoting unpaid time to exploring or developing areas without having to justify the merits or orientation of this work to the group. At the time, workers were encouraged to keep track of their hours so as to get a more accurate picture of future accounts. Around 2006-2007, this rationalisation of working methods was seen by



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Members of Kumbit, Montreal.

some workers as a form of omniscient technical control, creating unnecessary peer pressure. They requested that attempts at management should be focussed not on surveillance but on understanding the group's relational and organisational needs better. This need for a general understanding of the group's dynamics resulted in a fairly comprehensive document detailing how the group is organised, its changes, its meetings, its resolutions and its work processes. This document has been available on a public wiki since the organisation's beginnings: https://wiki.koumbit.net/.

Procedural openness as a form of activism

In 2008, I published an article on 'procedural openness' as a form of activism (Goldenberg, 2008). In the article I described the way in which Koumbit had developed a politicised approach to its work processes. By the term "procedural openness as a form of activism", I am referring to a vision of organisational methods as a commons, the technical and empirical knowledge of which is crucial to improving the way in which we live together. Meeting procedures, remuneration standards, how tasks are distributed and conflict-management tools are all detailed on the organisation's public wiki. Workers also have access to the minutes of all team meetings. Inspired by the free culture movement, the main factors for sustaining (and reproducing) this way of operating seem to be openness, transparency and documenting work procedures. It represents activism insofar as the group demands this procedural openness as a form of solidarity and social transparency.

By laying emphasis on procedural openness, the group is also highlighting what it refuses to be. Consequently, some clients are turned down if they are considered to be harmful to society. The tools used have also been chosen with regard to their

contribution to collective well-being. If a new recruit wishes to work at Koumbit, he or she must agree to respect the organisation's founding principles. These can be summed up according to three values[3]: self-management values (an open space based on equity, integrity, dignity and personal freedom), openness (open tools and formats, free exchange of information, respect for privacy and freedom of expression) and lastly, solidarity (with other groups, with like-minded organisations and with an exchange network in order to foster technological autonomy). We can see by these values that the group has clearly-defined boundaries, which, according to Elinor Ostrom (1990), is one of the fundamental principles for protecting the commons. Koumbit is generally self-managed. At its outset, the group adopted general rules which define a very non-hierarchical way of operating. The group's rules and procedures are discussed and reviewed at an annual retreat, which is often held in a chalet outside the city. The workers also meet for weekly team meetings where general business is discussed as well as any potential organisational problems. Before being adopted by the general assembly, most decisions concerning structural changes have been made by the workers. A board of directors governs the organisation but it is mostly there to ensure compliance with the regulations for Quebec non-profit organisations (OBNL). Its role is limited to giving advice to the work group from an external perspective and to act as mediator on the rare occasion that any disputes have not been resolved by the group.

A focus on care

Despite its organisational success and the recognition it has received socially, the group is undergoing several internal difficulties. An increase in the number of workers has required logistic restructuring. Yet some issues cannot be solved by just employing different work methods. When there are tensions around relational and communication issues, it becomes evident that the well-being of workers needs to be addressed.

One of the concerns involves gender relations. Like many IT groups, there is an imbalanced male-female ratio. In January 2014, Koumbit's wiki counted eighteen workers, three of which were female. Several women have worked at Koumbit as graphic designers or communication managers, but rarely do they hold technical management roles. To make up for this imbalance, the group is eager to employ female workers in administrative-type roles. There have been a number of discussions on gender relations and the role of women in Koumbit, which has raised the group's awareness of this issue. Although workers are now aware that this dynamic exists in the free culture sector, they are working to resolve it within their groups. Overall, the most rewarding tasks remain those related to the group's technical and financial operation. A number of workers are invested in addressing the issue of care, especially those involved in other self-managed groups. So certain Koumbit workers have

[3] www.koumbit.org/en/values

teamed up with workers from other politicised sectors concerned with collective management and well-being in the workplace to tackle similar issues. Koumbit's uniqueness thus stems from their ability to develop intelligence and awareness in the free IT sector, by transforming their experience into a commons which can serve as a model or be passed on to other groups.

Conclusion: IT work as commons work

In *Jalons pour un monde possible* (2010), Thomas Coutrot suggests thinking of work as a commons, the relational, physical and psychological conditions of which are jeopardised by contemporary neo-liberal capitalism. Coutrot also analyses the general loss of meaning and distress typical of work within big IT companies. For Coutrot, "decent work" should be considered a commons. Democratic decisions related to how the workplace is organised, what the company is invested in, and how profits are distributed all represent fundamental elements of decent work.

In addition to what is evoked by Koumbit's founding concept (a Haitian Creole expression meaning a group of people working towards a common goal), the group seems to be in tune with Coutrot's line of thinking. The group seeks to imagine the workplace as a space where members are involved in thinking over the conditions that inspire commitment and efficiency as well as creating an enjoyable space to work together. Furthermore, inspired by the free culture movement, the group has always kept records of its technical and organisational practices so that these records can be used by other groups or organisations, a dynamic referred to in my article on 'procedural openness as a form of activism'. This collective way of working, where members are involved in the group's operation, with the larger public in mind, establishes Koumbit's working methods as representing a commons.

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Technological Sovereignty

ALEX HACHÉ

Sociologist, with a PhD in social economy, and researcher on the use of ICT for the public good. She is involved in the development and use of free software as a tool for social and political change in local communities, in networks of socially-engaged researchers, in social movements, and in women's groups and youth groups.

I started to think about Technological Sovereignty (TS) following an interview with Margarita Padilla who completely changed my perception of technopolitics, and the motivations and aspirations behind its development. This article will define what I understand by TS, describe some common elements of the initiatives that contribute to its development, and reflect on its increasing importance in the struggle against the commodification, global monitoring and trivialization of communication infrastructures.

An initial problem faced by TS is the lack of free technologies. As indicated by Padilla: "The alternative projects that we are developing require contributions, but there is a void and we do not currently have the available resources for the sector of humanity that is using the Internet. We have completely lost sovereignty. We are using 2.0 tools as if they were gods, as if they were eternal, but they are not; they are in the hands of companies who, for better or for worse, may fail"[1]. We need to ask ourselves, how is it that regarding the tools we use in an increasingly ubiquitous manner, can we so easily delegate our electronic identity and its impact on our daily lives, to multinational companies, multimillionaires, kafkaesque nightmares: "We do it because we do not value it. We would do the same with food but self-consumption groups self-organize in order to have direct contact with providers, but then, why don't people self-organize their technological providers, buying the technological support they need directly from them, like carrots?"

[1] Available (in Spanish): https://vimeo.com/30812111

For people whose activism lies in the development of free technologies, it is (often) important to be able to convince their own friends, family, work colleagues, as well as the groups of which they are members, that it is important to value free alternatives. To do so they must also devise inclusive, pedagogical and innovative ways of persuasion. For example, in the previous question regarding the value we give to those who produce and maintain technologies that we need, the analogy between TS and food sovereignty is useful. This is a concept introduced in 1996 by Vía Campesina[2] to mark the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) World Food Summit. A later statement (Mali, 2007) defined it as follows:

"Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisan fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just income to all peoples and the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations."[3]

From this perspective, it is easier to make the notion of TS understandable. One could almost take this statement and swap "food" with "technology" and "peasants and farmers" with "technology developers". If this idea can be taken on-board, there is potential for it to start permeating the social imagination, producing a radical and transforming effect. Other starting points when thinking about TS lie in asking ourselves what ability and desire do we have to dream up our own technologies? And, why have we forgotten the crucial role that civil society plays in the designing of some of the most important technologies of recent history?

We define civil society as the ensemble of citizens and collectives whose individual and collective actions are not motivated primarily by profit, but rather by at attempt to meet desires and needs while promoting social and political transformation. So, in order to counter certain contingencies specific to social

[2] http://viacampesina.org/en/
[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Food_sovereignty



Foockinho (CC-BY-SA)

movements, such as the paradox of collective actions[4], unfavourable political opportunity structures or the lack of resource mobilisation, civil society has developed tactical uses of ICT, the media and other forms of expression. These include: campaigning to make struggles, actions and alternatives more visible; fund-raising and developing mechanisms to involve volunteers and participants (expand social strength and base); documenting processes to generate collective memory; facilitating the transfer of knowledge as well as access to information for all; improving internal collective management and organisation; setting up channels for interaction, promoting transparency and interaction with institutions and other agents; providing services and solutions to end-users, etc. These tactical uses and developments of technologies sometimes overlap with social innovation and collective intelligence dynamics such as cooperatives, public libraries, micro credits or alternative systems of resource exchange.

This said, civil society has never limited itself to the passive use of technological tools developed by others, that is to say, white, rich, often sociopathic men such as Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg. It has always contributed to the design of its own tools, thus promoting its own TS: community radio and television, launching the first non-military satellite, the first website with open and anonymous posting, freeing of cryptography, invention of software and free licences.

However, everything we do today in cyberspace, with a mobile phone or credit card, is proving more instrumental in shaping our electronic and social iden-

[4] "A 'free rider', in economics, refers to someone who benefits from resources, goods, or services without paying for the cost of the benefit." Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_rider_problem

tity. This abundance of information has become our social graph which, when analysed, reveals almost everything about us and the people we interact with. But what will it take for us to recognise the importance of having our own providers of free technologies? Do we need a technological catastrophe such as the breakdown of Google and all its services? Or is the knowledge that Microsoft, Yahoo, Google, Facebook, YouTube, AOL, Skype and Apple are in cahoots with the American National Security Agency to spy on us with the PRISM programme, enough to change our habits?

To counter these dynamics we need a multitude of informal initiatives, companies, cooperatives and collectives to provide the technology that we need, and whose design guarantees that they are free, appropriate and are not there to promote individuation or limit our freedoms, but to guarantee our rights in the spheres of expression, cooperation, privacy and anonymity. If we want technology to ensure these rights, we need to build and/or value them, and contribute to their development. As declared by the hacktivist collective Autistici/Inventati: "*Freedom and rights? You have to sweat blood for them! On the Internet, too*"[5].

404 not found – Sorry for the inconvenience, we are creating worlds!

TS deals with technologies developed by and for civil society, and the initiatives that form it attempt to create alternatives to commercial and/or military technologies. Their actions look to adhere to the imperatives of social responsibility, transparency and interactivity, which strengthens the degree of confidence placed in them. They are based on free software, hardware or licences because they use and develop them (often combining both dynamics), but their characteristics go beyond this contribution. In other words, belonging to the free and open world is not necessarily synonymous with belonging to the TS world.

Based on a critical approach of technology, these initiatives also look at how we relate to each other, interact, and consume technology. They aim to understand how ecological and social costs in their production centres can be met, as well as dismantling programmed obsolescence[6] and extending the life and efficiency of any technology, product or service, as much as possible. And in a sense, it attempts to face technological fetishism, defined by the Wu Ming collective as those discourses and practices where:

"the spotlight is always on the practices of liberation pervading the Internet – i.e. the kind of practices we Wu Ming have put time and effort into for twenty

[5] "Freedom and rights? You have to sweat blood for them! On the Internet, too. Source: http://www.infoaut.org/index.php/english/item/8937-freedom-and-rights?-you-have-to-sweat-blood-for-them-on-the-internet-too-infoaut-interviews-autistici/inventati

[6] We recommend this didactic video idiots; (A tale by Big Lazy Robot VFX
Music and sound design by Full Basstards) fetishism with Apple products: https://www.youtube.com

years –, which are customarily described as the rule. In this way, people dismiss as exceptions all the practices of subjugation , e.g. using the net to exploit or underpay intellectual work, to control and arrest people, to impose new idols and fetishes, to spread the dominant ideology, to enforce the same financial capitalism that's destroying us."

This criticism of technological fetishism has also been highlighted by collectives such as Ippolita, Planéte Laboratoire, Bureau d'etudes, Tiqqun and hacktivist collectives that maintain free tools. They are all playing a role in re-thinking the ontologies and paradigms inherited from cybernetics, highlighting that the contexts, motivations and means used for the development of technology amount to and determine their social, economic and political impact. While the causal relationship can be difficult to prove, understanding is less important than the non-existence of neutral technologies. These are all statements of intent and lead to various consequences. How many and which of these we choose to include, select, sustain or reject continues to be our responsibility as communicative beings.

Thinking about TS also means researching the types of social processes in which diverse technologies appear and how they promote autonomy, whether they be day-to-day technologies with their everyday problem-solving processes or more complex devices that require design and maintenance to reach their goals. These could be versatile technologies that serve various functions, digital technology from cyberspace, but also gender technologies and those to do with subjectivity. We can also define and simplify some aspects such as how 'usable' they are or how much involvement and attention is required for their functioning. We are all experts in our own relationship with technology, therefore we can all play at analysing them in order to reinvent them.

TS technopolitics

The development of TS initiatives encourages social transformation by empowering its participants, either through participative development methodology that combines "do it yourself" with a "do it together" approach, or with models that focus on cooperation, negotiation, p2p exchange and other expressions of social economy. The importance of TS also lies in virtuous loops generated through the use of these productive work methods and the redistribution of resources. It is not only initiatives, companies or cooperatives seeking to create a new business model, but also ways of experimenting that aim to be sustainable and, in turn, create new worlds.

Up to this point we have referred to these initiatives in an abstract manner, looking for common elements that differentiate them from other similar projects. Another important differentiator of these alternatives lies in the technopolitics which they

belong to. This is made up of ideologies, social norms and personal relations. Technopolitics implies combining technology and activism, and trying to pool available resources (materials, knowledge, experience) with political objectives and practices, in the best way possible. Adjustments can be made at each level. At times, there are clear political objectives, but people don't agree, or do agree but are not able to pool together the necessary resources to carry out actions. However, sometimes everything works and there is a perfect balance between political ideas and practice, between a multitude of nodes and efficient resource mobilisation. Technopolitics is the *ad perpetum* quest for this balance amongst people, resources and politics.

A round table discussion held in Amsterdam in 2012 for the Unlike Us event dealt with the problems faced by decentralized free networks, and indicated that TS initiatives shared several redundant bugs. These are situations that repeat themselves and impair their sustainability, resilience and scalability. Several of the problems put forward relate to the fact they are social and political transformation collectives with their own political ideas and practice.

Within many TS initiatives there exists, for example, a clear emphasis on putting hacker ethics into practice. This refers to a distrust towards instances of power and hierarchy, together with a hands-on attitude, the desire to share, and the quest for more openness, decentralization and freedom in order to make the world a better place. Another subsequent political element lies in improving what already exists (for example: codes, documentation, research). However, for various reasons, due to the lack of efficiency of repositories, and semantic language that makes it difficult to find what you're looking for, or due to a lack in documentation of what is being done, many free technology projects choose to start from zero. Personal egos and the belief that one can do it better than others also come into play (reinventing the wheel). Thus, better tools and methodology are needed, as well as increased collective awareness of the importance of investing more time into research and documentation of what is being done, in order to pool and promote collective collaboration.

Moreover, many TS initiatives emerge out of small informal collectives. This may be because these groups have some degree of technical knowledge, and the will to learn about issues that are not yet as valued by the majority of citizens, or because the margin between passive/active consumption/use is blurred. Informality and experimentation are not in themselves good or bad; they are ways of coming together to carry out collective action. But we must be aware that by adopting consensus decision-making methods, and by leaning towards horizontality, a collective does not totally break with relationships of power and privileges. Over time, every collective faces these at varied levels of intensity. Feminist thinker Jo Freeman theorized about this 'tyranny of structurelessness', explaining that this apparent void is often disguised by "an informal, unacknowledged and unaccountable leadership that is all the more pernicious because its very existence is denied".

It is important to be aware of the roles and tasks carried out by participants of a project, and to see how they self-organize. Technopolitics implies a need to have a balance between social and political knowledge, programming, management, disclosure and the creation of N-1 synergies. A technopolitical collective that values the work and contributions of all its parts, and is aware of the relations of power that run through it, possibly has a better capacity to endure.

Lastly, we would like to highlight some components that seem to be missing in communities working towards TS. We have shown how some of them are informal, mobile and permanently changing . Their nature tends to place them under the radar of institutions, for better or for worse. For better, because the experimental and inventive nature of TS initiatives can lead them to move within the sphere of alegality, forcing the laws of the leading class to adapt, and also because it allows a level of independence from the set agenda of public institutions on culture, research and development. For worse, because it complicates strategic access to public funds that could strengthen TS for and by civil society.

Moreover, many of these collectives are not ready to deal with underlying issues to do with distribution of donations and subsidies. Rethinking the economic nature of our, until now voluntary and dissident, production, and discussing which tasks should be paid, and in what form, can be tricky subjects. Furthermore, when dealing with subsidies, the numbers and promises need to add up, which leads to tensions in any bureaucratic relationship. Thus, more collectives working on these issues and focussed on facilitating synergies between similar projects are needed.

In addition, the task of raising awareness of the importance of using and supporting alternatives to protect an open, free, safe, decentralized and neutral Internet should be taken on by a wider range of actors and organizations within civil society and citizens movements. This task cannot continue to be left primarily in the hands of collectives who research and develop free technologies.

We must all contribute to defending a free and open Internet. A collective effort which is more focussed on our technological sovereignty is already showing its transformational, revolutionary capacity. As pertinently put by the Association of Autonomous Astronauts when they highlighted the importance of re-appropriating and building new insights regarding our future: "Zero gravity communities are at hand, only the inertia of society prevents them from forming. But their basis is there, and we will develop the propulsion to reach them".

TS represents these zero gravity communities, every day getting closer to lift off.

WEBSITES

- **Agencia Latinoamericana de Información (ALAI)**
  www.alainet.org
- **Alliance internationale de journalistes**
  www.alliance-journalistes.net
- **Altermondes**
  www.altermondes.org
- **Association mondiale des radiodiffuseurs communautaires (AMARC)**
  www.amarc.org
- **Association pour la promotion, la démocratisation et de la diffusion du logiciel libre (APRIL)**
  www.april.org
- **Basta!**
  www.bastamag.net
- **E-joussour**
  www.e-joussour.net
- **Ciranda internationale de communication partagée**
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  www.conectas.org
- **Forum national pour la démocratisation de la communication (FNDC)**
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- **French Data Network (FDN)**
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- **Free Software Foundation**
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- **Forum mondial des médias libres**
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The way we communicate has changed dramatically in recent years with advances in information and communication technology (ICT), especially the Internet. Understanding the technological landscape in front of us is of utmost importance if we want to identify the power relations currently at play in the information sector.

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(...) Yet the emergence of cooperative production processes and the creation of new media, free software and free protocols are proof that creativity and innovation can bypass economic interests (to some extent, at least) and that the creative forces of the imagination can also shape the future.

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